

HARD HEAVY METAL

PARKWAY DRIVE

Winston McCall:
"I started to
embrace nihilism"

KORN

The drugs and
violence behind
Freak On A Leash

STRANGER THINGS

Meet the real
Eddie Munson

TATTOO THE PLANET

Slayer, Pantera
and the tour that
went to hell

HEILUNG

Vikings, mummies
and shamans - WTF?

LACUNA COIL

Cristina Scabbia
answers your
questions

MACHINE HEAD

ROBB FLYNN COMES OUT SWINGING

BLOODYWOOD

LIMP BIZKIT

A.A. WILLIAMS

THE HALO EFFECT

OCEANS OF SLUMBER

OZZY OSBOURNE

THE PRODIGY

BLIND GUARDIAN

MACHINE HEAD

AMON MARTH

THE HALO EFFECT



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Future PLC, 121 - 141 Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, London, W2 6JR

Web: www.metalhammer.com

Letters: metalhammer@futurenet.com

Editorial

Editor Eleanor Goodman

eleanor.goodman@futurenet.com

Production Editor Vanessa Thorpe

vanessa.thorpe@futurenet.com

Reviews Editor Jonathan Selzer

jonathan.selzer@futurenet.com

Art Editor Louise Brock

louise.brock@futurenet.com

Associate Editor Dave Everley

dave.everley@futurenet.com

Staff Writer Rich Hobson

rich.hobson@futurenet.com

Content Director - Music Scott Rowley

Contributors

Steve Appleford, Oliver Badin, Adam Brennan, Richard Chamberlain, Chris Chantler, Alec Chillingworth, Joe Daly, Hywel Davies, Remfry Dedman, Alex Deller, Jerry Ewing, Spencer Grady, Stephen Hill, Emma Johnston, Tyler Dammara Kelly, Hannah May Kilroy, Dom Lawson, Elliot Leaver, Dannii Leivers, Dave Ling, Clay Marshall, Will Marshall, Sophie Maughan, Edwin McFee, Joel McIver, Matt Mills, Morat, Tom O'Boyle, Alastair Riddell, Liz Scarlett, Rosie Solomon, Kevin Stewart-Panko, James Weaver, Christina Wenig, Kez Whelan, Jon Wiederhorn, Holly Wright, Nik Young

Cover Photography: Travis Shinn Parkway Drive cover: Dave LePage

Image Manipulation: Chris Sagers Design: John Woolford

Photography

Justin Borucki, Derek Bremner, Steve Bright, Janson Bulpin, Stephanie Cabral, Duncan Everson, Nick Fancher, Andy Ford, Mick Hutson, Will Ireland, Simon Kallas, George Chin, Tina Korhonen, Marie Korner, Dave LePage, John McMurtrie, Kevin Nixon, Katja Ogrin, Jake Owens, Emma Painter, Tom Russell, Jeremy Saffer, Ester Segarra, James Sharrock, Travis Shinn, Frank White, Jonathan Weiner, Dani Willgress, Neil Zlozower

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Advertising

Media packs are available on request

Advertising Sales Director Lara Jaggon - lara.jaggon@futurenet.com

Advertising Manager Helen Hughes - helen.hughes@futurenet.com

Account Director Steven Pyatt - steven.pyatt@futurenet.com

Account Director Ayomide Magbagbeola - ayomide.magbagbeola@futurenet.com

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Head of Print Licensing Rachel Shaw - licensing@futurenet.com

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Email enquiries help@magazinesdirect.com

UK orderline & enquiries 0330 333 1113

Overseas orderline & enquiries +44 330 333 1113

Online orders & enquiries www.magazinesdirect.com

Head of subscriptions Sharon Todd

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Circulation

Head of Newstrade Tim Mathers

Production

Head of Production Mark Constance

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Senior Ad Production Manager Jo Crosby

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Digital Editions Controller Jason Hudson

Production Manager Keely Miller

Management

Managing Director - Music Stuart Williams

Head of Design (London) Brad Merrett

Chairman Richard Huntingford

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

ISSN 0955-1190

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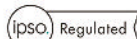
Metal Hammer (ISSN 0955-1190) September, Issue 365, is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK

The US annual subscription price is \$194.87 Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc, c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Metal Hammer, World Container Inc, c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Richard Huntingford
Chief financial officer Penny Laidlaw-Bisland

Tel +44 (0)225 442 244



CAN YOU FEEL MY CATHARSIS?

WHEN MACHINE HEAD released their ninth album, *Catharsis*, in 2018, it's fair to say the reaction from fans was pretty brutal. Then, long-standing members Dave McClain and Phil Demmel quit. You could have forgiven Robb Flynn for picking up his ball and going home, but instead he rallied, toured, and is back with a refreshed line-up and a rager of an album in *Of Kingdom And Crown*. Oh, and did we mention it's the band's first concept record?

Our Dom Lawson sat down with the man himself to get the inside scoop on everything you need to know about Machine Head's ambitious new chapter. And when they hit the UK with Amon Amarth in September for the epically named Vikings And Lionhearts tour, we're expecting it to be very special indeed.

Talking of epics, we're still recovering from the two-part finale of *Stranger Things* and *that Master Of Puppets* solo. After we'd finished bowing down and praising Hellfire Club founder and guitar hero Eddie Munson, we got actor Joseph Quinn on the phone to fanboy over it - see p.106 for the results. In short: fuck Vecna, long live Eddie Munson, and long live metal.

Horns up,

E

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

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MEET THE BAND



DOM LAWSON
WRITER

Dom and Robb Flynn go waaaaay back, so who better than to write our triumphant Machine Head cover feature? Dom also reviewed the brilliant new album from Ozzy Osbourne, finding The Prince Of Darkness on glorious, inimitable, loveable form.



HANNAH MAY KILROY
WRITER

If she's not swearing like Father Jack, paddling in the ocean or chilling with Burt the dog, Hannah can be found listening to everything from classic metal to prog. She spoke to Oceans Of Slumber about their take on the Southern Gothic.



CHRISTINA WENIG
WRITER

When she's not scouring Berlin for the best vegan ice cream emporiums, Christina's natural home is the most enlightened realms of the underground scene. This month she mind-melded with Heilung's Kai Uwe Faust to chart his remarkable spiritual journey.



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THE BIG PICTURE GOODNIGHT KISS

FLAMES. FIREWORKS. EGOS. It seldom comes bigger in rock and metal than Kiss. The New York rockers have crossed the planet countless times over the past 50 years, inspiring legions of bands (and fans) to up the theatricality, get creative with make-up and put on the best damn show on the planet.

But now the end is truly in sight, as the band wrapped up the European leg of their End Of The Road tour at the Ziggo Dome in Amsterdam, apparently the last show they'll ever play on the continent – for the time being, at least.

Blood-spewing, fire-belching demon Gene Simmons has alluded to the fact that 'another 100 dates' may have been booked for 2023 and no final, *final* date has been announced (and we can guess that'll be a massive blow-out), but right now it looks like this very well could be it for Kiss, the band heading off into the night just shy of their 50th anniversary. Until then, we can rest easy that while Kiss are still on the road we'll still hear those iconic words: 'YOU WANTED THE BEST? YOU GOT THE BEST – THE HOTTEST BAND IN THE WORLD... KISS!' ■





THE HOT TOPIC

SCREAMING FOR VENGEANCE

Starring a bunch of your favourite rockstars and lashings of blood, *The Retaliators* is the most metal horror flick you'll see this year

METAL HAS LONG been friends with horror, but gory new film *The Retaliators* aims to take their relationship to the next level. Made by Better Noise Films, it features appearances from musicians such as Papa Roach's Jacoby Shaddix, Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee, Ice Nine Kills' Spencer Charnas and members of Five Finger Death Punch. Not only that, but those artists and more are featured on a 17-song soundtrack, plus the score was written by *Stranger Things* composers Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein. It's fair to say, it's a hell of a spectacle.

The film follows pastor John Bishop (played by Michael Lombardi, who starred in US comedy-drama *Rescue Me*), a peaceful single father who's devoted to his two daughters, and faces the ultimate horror when one of them is brutally murdered. Events take an even more gruesome, unexpected turn, and he must decide whether to stick to his moral code or turn his back on God and take revenge.

"JACOBY SHADDIX PULLED MY HAIR AND LICKED MY FACE. IT GENUINELY HURT AND FELT WEIRD!"

MICHAEL LOMBARDI



The Retaliators was written by brothers Darren Geare and Jeff Allen Geare, and inspired by a tragic attack on their younger sister, Jody. She was raped at the age of 19 and managed to escape, working through the trauma and forging a career as a firefighter. Fourteen years later, the perpetrator was caught and put on trial. Darren and his brother were writing screenplays at the time, and he had an idea: "What if there was this service that was provided for family members of heinous crime victims, that gave you the opportunity for a minute alone with them?"

After getting Jody's blessing, they set to work on *The Retaliators*. "There's a few happy endings," says Darren. "The guy ended up basically getting put away for life, thank goodness, and my sister went on to become one of the very few female fire captains in the country."

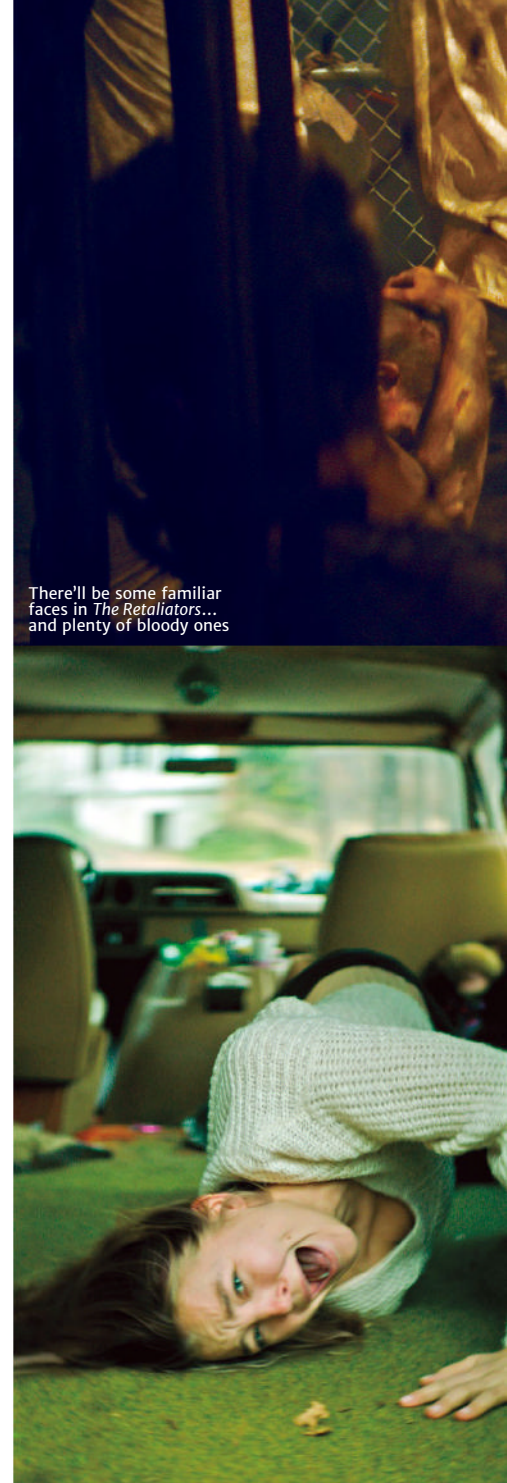
Jody's history informed the way they presented death onscreen – "We wanted to be tasteful

when it came to the victims, and then really go for it with all of the bad guys," explains Darren – and it's fair to say there's a lot of blood, especially when proceedings ramp up in the third act. Among a series of gnarly scenes, there's a memorably grisly incident with an eyeball that'll have you turning away from the screen. "I couldn't watch the dailies of the eyeball scene!" laughs Darren. "I can watch it now, but that was hard. And we were so proud of that. My dream was to have one gag that you could not forget when the movie was over."



JACOBY SHADDIX: PRESS/BEN DUGGAN

There'll be some familiar faces in *The Retaliators*... and plenty of bloody ones





As well as paying tribute to *Evil Dead*, there are nods to *The Hills Have Eyes*. “I’m a huge Wes Craven fan,” explains Darren, “and what’s funny is the second I saw Joseph Gatt, who plays [murderer] Ram Kady, he had a similar look to the guy from the original *The Hills Have Eyes* [Michael Berryman].”

Then there are the rockstar cast members, who Darren and Michael Lombardi have nothing but praise for – particularly Jacoby Shaddix, who plays monstrous criminal Quinn Brady. At one point, pastor John Bishop is pinned down on the floor, when Quinn decides to strike. “He literally pulled my hair and held my head back, and licked me from my chin all the way across my face, across my forehead, full length,” laughs Michael, also a producer/co-director on the film. “It genuinely hurt, it genuinely felt weird! I was like, ‘Oh my god, he’s so committed!’”

Alongside Papa Roach, it’s soundtracked by a ton of artists from Better Noise Music, including Five Finger Death Punch, The Hu, Nothing More, Bad Wolves and more, in a callback to the 90s/early 00s heyday where movies and metal soundtracks went hand in hand. It’s something lifelong metalhead Darren had never planned for when originally he wrote the script, but he connected to Better Noise via a longstanding friendship with Michael, who had worked with the company on previous film *Sno Babies* – and he’s thrilled they picked up the script.

“Back in the day, you had the *Last Action Hero* soundtrack, and the *Bill*

& *Ted* soundtrack,” he enthuses. “There were so many movies where you had all these hard rock or metal bands, and it was always just such an event.”

Whether it’s Papa Roach’s *The Ending* playing during the film’s foreboding opening scenes or The Hu’s *Wolf Totem* ratcheting up the tension during a display of gang violence, the music heightens the action throughout. For Darren, it only enhances the “rock’n’roll spirit” that’s haunted his vision for *The Retaliators* all along.

“It really was meant to be dark, but also fun – and that’s metal,” he says. “Metal’s dark to me, but it also charges my life.”

The most metal horror film you’ll see all year? We reckon so. Hold onto your eyeballs, because things are about to get biblical... **H**

THE RETALIATORS IS IN CINEMAS FROM SEPTEMBER 14, AND THE SOUNDTRACK IS AVAILABLE ON SEPTEMBER 16 VIA BETTER NOISE. MOVIE TICKETS ARE ON PRE-SALE NOW VIA WWW.RETALIATORSMOVIE.COM

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What’s been blowing our tiny brains

MOST. METAL. EVER

The conclusion to *Stranger Things* season 4 was epic and metal AF, featuring Metallica’s *Master Of Puppets*, hordes of winged monsters and the sword from *Conan The Barbarian*.



...AND NOW METALLICA ARE IN THE TOP 40 AGAIN

Master Of Puppets is Metallica’s 20th UK Top 40 hit. Thanks, *Stranger Things*!

ROB ZOMBIE’S THE MUNSTERS REMAKE IS... WHOLESOME?

There’s not a lick of gore in the trailer! Colour us intrigued.

TAIKA WAITITI IS A MASSIVE GUNS N’ ROSES FAN

Turns out *Sweet Child O’ Mine* wasn’t a fluke in the *Thor: Love And Thunder* trailer – the whole movie is bursting with GN’R goodness.

NITA STRAUSS HAS SPLIT FROM ALICE COOPER

She’s left his band to join pop singer Demi Lovato on tour. It doesn’t seem metal, but...

DEMI LOVATO LOVES DIMMU BORGIR

Yep, really. Maybe Nita will be more at home than we first thought!

BON JOVI ARE OFFICIALLY IN THE MCU

The New Jersey prince plays a pretty pivotal role in *Ms. Marvel*. Cameo in *The Marvels*, please?

INCLUSIVITY ROCKS

From Rammstein inviting fans with visual impairments to feel the stage at their recent gigs, to Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder dancing with BSL interpreters at Hyde Park, we’re here for all of this.

DAVID DRAIMAN ISN’T AFRAID OF AN APOLOGY

Justin Hawkins said his worst experience as a support act was when The Darkness played with Disturbed. David then took to Twitter to apologize. Class act.

DAVE MUSTAINE IS ANGRY AGAIN

MegaDave got mega-pissed when a guitar tech on the neighbouring stage tried soundchecking during Megadeth’s set at Barcelona Rock Fest. Mega-oops.



WHO ARE THE KING AND QUEEN OF THE GOTHS?

Cristina Scabbia's been at the forefront of gothic metal for 25 years. But can she handle her acolytes' questions on 'female-fronted metal' and band bust-ups?

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: CUNENE

SHE MAY SHARE vocal duties with the growling Andrea Ferro in Lacuna Coil, but Cristina Scabbia has always attracted the spotlight. For a quarter of a century, she's been Milan's most gothic export, flooring crowds with her soaring voice. Such is her charisma that she's in demand all over the world, and has collaborated with everyone from Megadeth to Alter Bridge. She also uses her downtime to stream on Twitch and is a bona fide videogame know-it-all. Does she even sleep?!

What is your favourite *Final Fantasy* game?

@CMilesRacer

"VII, without a shadow of a doubt. The first one I played and the most iconic. It was the first one on PS1. It changed the world of videogames, especially in the RPG genre! I was really into the story and it came out when my love of videogames was getting even bigger. And I had a huge crush on Sephiroth."

If you and Andrea had to swap roles, who'd sing the other's parts best?

Rhiannon Clark, email

"Probably me, because they call me a parrot in the band; I like to imitate other people's voices. I wouldn't be as good as he is with growling, but I would definitely try my best to imitate him."

Hammer: Is there ever a point, when you're playing live and he's singing, where you go "I wish I had this bit!"?

"I want to try growling, because I've never done it. I feel that, if I knew the

technique, I'd be really good because I have a lot of volume on my diaphragm. There was one time in Atlanta where I had to sing the whole show because Andrea was in the hospital with a dislocated shoulder. We didn't want to cancel the show. It was a lot of fun and extremely special, because I was singing those parts in a different way."

Did it piss you off to be lumped in with the whole symphonic thing in the early 2000s and all the 'female-fronted metal' shit?

Lexi Johnson, Facebook

"It doesn't really piss me off, because I understand that many people don't know the kind of music we play. If you say 'female-fronted band,' they kind of have an idea of the music you're playing, even if every band is different. What I hate is when they put you in one category: 'OK, the girl is gonna sing

this way.' You don't ask a guy: 'Are you part of a male-fronted band?' It's not a genre; it's an indication that there's a female who sings. So, if you like female voices, you'll like it, but it's not a genre."

Are there any people/artists you would like to collaborate with that you haven't already?

@Leonski700

"A million artists! But I've always liked Korn. I know Jonathan Davis as a person and he's awesome, and I've always found his vocal lines very interesting. I like the way he writes, even when he's alone and writing soundtracks. I love music that was written for movies and videogames. I get a lot of inspiration from soundtracks. So, there are many artists I'd love to collaborate with and Jonathan is definitely one of them."

Hammer: What franchise soundtrack would you love to do?

"*Final Fantasy*, although I don't know if I could do 'proper' music for it, because it's very classical. I'd love to do something for an action series or movie. Not Marvel or DC, though – maybe something more like *John Wick*, and especially the villain parts."

Are there any more Italian-language songs on the horizon? *Comalies* was so beautiful!

@jenmyalaking

"Not at the moment. We are writing new music and we just recorded for a special project. When we do write Italian parts, we don't do it on



Cristina? Collaborating with JD?
Someone make it happen!

**“IF BEING SEXY IS THE ONLY
THING YOU HAVE TO OFFER,
THAT’S KIND OF SAD”**

purpose. For us, the sound of the words we're singing is really important. Italian is perfect for traditional music, but if you use it in metal, it sounds weird."

Hammer: What's the special project?

"We're basically redoing *Comalies* from scratch. We wanted to celebrate its 20th anniversary but not in a nostalgic way. We were very against a remastered version. We asked: 'How can we celebrate it while being fresh and modern?'; so we rewrote it as we would have written it in 2022. We've changed the music; most of the parts are completely different."

You're a tour guide in Milan for the day. What's on the agenda?

Joe Stile, email

"Definitely the Dome. It's in the city centre, so it's the first thing you see when you get out of the underground in Duomo. The view is stunning! It's one of the most beautiful cathedrals you will ever see. Then I'd take them to eat panzerotti [a smaller version of calzone] at Luini. Everybody would be really impressed, because it's really good. I'd also take them to [Leonardo Da Vinci's painting] The Last Supper. We have the original in Milan, so that'd be cool. Then I'd take them out for a good pizza."

Who are the king and queen of the goths?

Alex Carr, Facebook

"Peter Steele and Siouxsie Sioux."

As a former winner, should there be a future for magazine features like 'Hottest Chicks in Metal'?

Jo Fleischer, Facebook

"I'm honestly split. I hate when the image of a woman is completely sexualised, especially if there is talent behind her. But, at the same time, if you are in complete control of that sexualisation and you are the one deciding to present yourself in that way, it's actually really empowering. There's nothing wrong with liking yourself or feeling sexy and beautiful and showing it. Put it this way: in the music world, if being sexy is the only thing that you have to offer, that's kind of sad."

When was the last time you thought Lacuna Coil might break up?

James Young, email

"It happened at the beginning of our career. Our first line-up split right after

"IN LACUNA COIL, I AM FREE TO EXPRESS MYSELF"

the first tour. Our EP wasn't even out! That was the only time that I thought it could end. Marco [Coti Zelati, bass], Andrea and I decided to go on because we wanted to and the label [Century Media] asked us to. It never happened again. We've never had any doubts."

Are you an Interista or a Milanista?

@TimeTraveller

"Are you really asking?! AC Milan! I Rossoneri forever!"

Who's the metal band that should be way bigger than they are?

Caren Poccok, email

"Twelve Foot Ninja. They remind me of Faith No More. I think they could be and should be much more popular."

Would you ever consider a solo album? What would it sound like?

Sam Petersson, Facebook

"Not at the moment. I think it would make sense if you could do something totally different to what you do in the band and, in Lacuna Coil, I am free to express myself. One day I will do it, but just to see if I'm actually able to put together something cool."

What was your favourite Lacuna Coil record to make and why?

Bindi Louise, Facebook

"I don't have a favourite record, but maybe [2019's] *Black Anima*, the last one; it's fresher to my ears. I certainly know which one is my least favourite. It's not because of the music or songwriting, but it's [2016's] *Delirium*. My life was a mess, with a lot of illness

Hand over the *Elden Ring* collectors' edition and no one gets hurt

around me. If you want to look at the positives, it made the vibe of the record more intense, but it was very difficult to rehearse and record that album."

What is your favourite Lacuna Coil song? So many to choose from!

@Rustymoon88

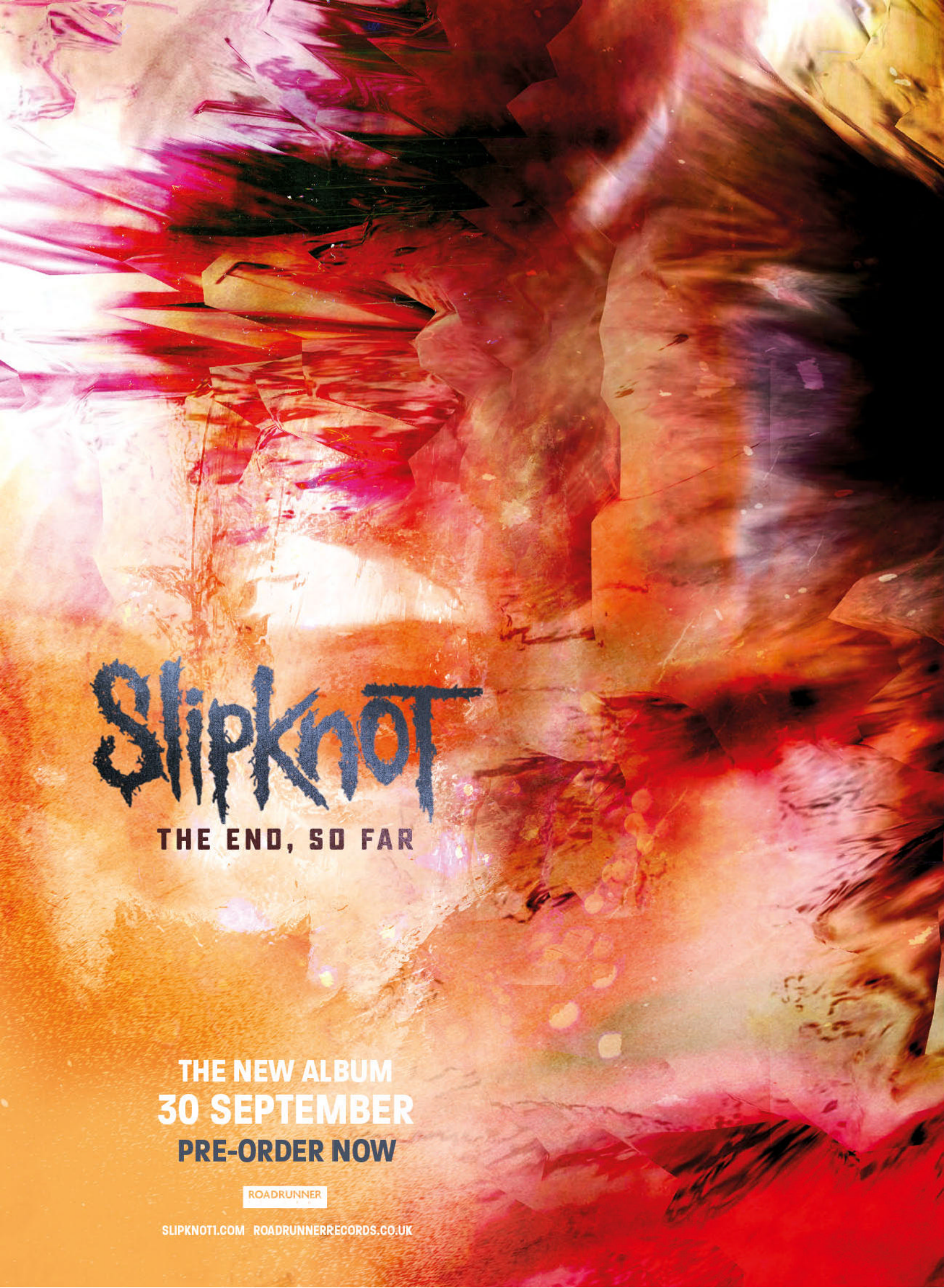
"I'd say it's between *Veneficium* [from *Black Anima*] and *Blood, Tears, Dust* [from *Delirium*]. I don't have favourites, but they're the ones that I'm enjoying on stage very much at the moment. You might as well be asking a mum to name their favourite son or daughter!"

What videogame are you most excited about that's coming out?

Leanna Smith, email

"*God Of War Ragnarök*. That is definitely the one that I am looking forward to. There's a great collectors' edition coming out in a few days with Mjölfnir as well. I really hope that I'm going to be able to get it. I still regret that I didn't get the *Elden Ring* collectors' edition with the helmet. My boyfriend got it, so I said, 'What do I need it for?' Then I saw the helmet. Now I want one!" **H**

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THE END, SO FAR

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THE SLAYLIST

JAYANT BHADULA

Bloodywood's screamer-in-chief tips his cap to the excellent metal he grew up on, from Linkin Park to All Shall Perish

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: ADELINE L. JANOVICZ

"LINKIN PARK ARE how I got into metal. Instead of the conventional way of getting into metal, like Metallica, I went through Linkin Park, Rammstein and Amon Amarth. I sang *Somewhere I Belong* when I was 15 at a school singing competition and I won second prize. It's one of these tracks where we [in Bloodywood] can all agree that it's great. The next song is *This Fire Burns* by **KILLSWITCH ENGAGE**. I didn't even know it existed until I saw CM Punk walking out to this song. I don't even watch WWE a lot; it was just on the TV. I became a fan of CM Punk because of the song: 'This guy walks out to metal? Awesome!' Speaking of wrestling, to this day, I don't like the original intro to *Metalingus* by **ALTER BRIDGE**. I need to listen to Edge's theme song – that opening gets me hyped! Myles Kennedy is a phenomenal singer. That entire band is a recipe for success; those four members are the perfect ingredients for food that will comfort your soul. Mark [Tremonti] is a magician on the guitar.

"I love **SLIPKNOT**. A lot. For me, five vocalists are the gods of heavy metal: Randy Blythe, Mitch Lucker, Jens Kidman, Mikael Åkerfeldt and, obviously, Corey Taylor. *People = Shit* is the song where I went, 'Daaaaamn! He's doing so much in one go!' He's doing cleans, then he's switching to growling, then he's screaming, and he can do everything in between as well. You need that versatility. I've got a lot of progressive sludge metal influences and that's because of **MESHUGGAH**. In New Delhi, *Bleed* was the staple. If you wanted to be a good drummer, you needed to cover *Bleed*. There are so many good songs – *Demiurge*, *Rational Gaze*, *I Am Colossus* – but I think my personal favourite is *New Millennium Cyanide Christ*. The [guitar] lead is so good and that rhythm just gets you going!

"HATE THEM OR LOVE THEM, LIMP BIZKIT CHANGED THE WORLD"

Jayant has come a long way since the school singing competition!

LISTEN NOW
Head to spoti.fi/3BgV57c to listen to Jayant Bhadula's slaylist

"OPETH released *The Roundhouse Tapes* in 2007 but I got my hands on it in 2010. To this day, when I feel like I'm not a good performer and I need some encouragement, I'll watch it. There are so many perfect moments, like *Demon Of The Fall*. When they start that song, it is really cool! *The Roundhouse Tapes* changed my life. My friend gave it to me on a USB drive when I was trying to start a band, and I'd scream along with Mikael, watching it while wearing earphones.

"I never really got that deep into **INSOMNIUM**, but I love *The Lay Of Autumn*. For me, it's just the melodies in those guitars. I don't even think words can explain them properly. The guitars speak on their own. You feel what they're trying to emote. The next one is *Wage Slaves* by **ALL SHALL PERISH**. All Shall Perish were way ahead of their time. That's why, I think, a lot of people didn't understand them. That band should have been destined for greatness. If they were around in the late 2010s, they would have left a trail of devastation. Their singer [Eddie Hermida] is the current singer of Suicide Silence. As soon as he took on vocal duties, I was like: 'Yeah, you could not have found a better pick.'

"The lyrical content on all of **RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE**'s songs is just awesome! On *Calm Like A Bomb*, [Zack De La Rocha] says, 'There's a bank, there's a church, a myth and a hearse / A mall and a loan, a child dead at birth.' They're speaking about America, but these things are common everywhere, in every country. Banks are leeching off of people and people are dying. RATM talk for the people, I think. My last pick is *Take A Look Around* by **LIMP BIZKIT**. No one would ever tell you this, but Limp Bizkit changed the world. They sneakily put metal into everyone's houses. Kids could go, 'Oh yeah, I like this!', even if they didn't know what this music is. You can hate them or you can love them, but you cannot deny that they were everywhere!" **H**

BLOODYWOOD TOUR THE UK IN AUGUST. THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, RAKSHAK, IS OUT NOW



IN THE STUDIO

A.A. WILLIAMS

Death gospel's high priestess promises a devastating experience with her second album

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

WHEN A.A. WILLIAMS released *Forever Blue* in 2020, it helped redefine the boundaries of what heaviness could be. Sidestepping distorted guitars and drums, her debut combined elements of classical and post-metal in a hauntingly beautiful fusion. Call it death gospel, post-metal, post-classical or whatever, either way her captivating sound continues to challenge our definition of heavy music. We caught up with Williams to find out what album #2, *As The Moon Rests*, has in store...

What do you see as the biggest difference in approach between *Forever Blue* and *As The Moon Rests*?

"From a practical point of view, it was working on the album in a studio from start to finish. That wasn't possible with *Forever Blue* because a lot of it was done in my home, then taken into a studio to expand on what had already been made. I am rudimentary in my approach to this stuff – I know some basics, but I need super-experienced people to point me in the right direction sometimes. Being able to spend all that time with knowledgeable people meant I could devote more time to things like guitar tones, or recording with proper strings on the album. For *Forever Blue* it was just me layering cello parts, which was great in that context, but having then done [2021 EP] *Arco* in the middle with actual strings, you can't exactly go backwards."

Are there any lessons you learned from *Songs From Isolation*, the covers album you released in



A.A. Williams, in her element

2021, that you have applied to the new record?

"Embrace the little imperfections. I've never been shy of them, but *Songs From Isolation* was full of little creaks, coughs and jewellery jangling – these little things you might miss, but once you've noticed them you can never ignore them again. In the song *Evaporate* there is a quiet section where there was a word that just wouldn't come out, but it sounded so much cooler and more emotional than all the other takes, so we kept it in. It's nice to remind people that you are a human being."

What was it like working at Clever Pup studios and did you ever find yourself pining to be back in your bedroom?

"I loved it! I'd record every day if I could. I know some people find it stressful, committing ideas to tape – or the digital equivalent at least – and some people find that nerve-racking. But I love it, it's like being in a kitchen with loads of ingredients. Even your own elements – we'd spend hours playing with guitar tones, doing all those little things you want to try out to really experiment."

What has engineer/mixer Adrian Hall brought to your sound?

"Adrian is literally the most experienced human I know. He's amazing; I took him the EP way back, which we'd basically all done at home

except for the drums, which needed to be done in a studio. It was the same when we went in to record the album – we turned up with a mostly completed demo but it was like, 'Fix this, please!' He has an insane CV, this huge range of artists he works with. For someone like that, you'd normally expect them to pick only the best, most popular acts, but his work is so varied. He treats your art seriously and that's so, so special. He was working with us right after Tori Amos, which is really cool too."

What themes were you looking to explore on the new album?

"Although it's still very introspective, there's also this idea of being OK with how things are, not obsessing over things. I think it's easy for us to look at certain aspects of ourselves like anxieties and fears and try to fix them. But it's more important sometimes to *manage* these things, to try to understand them and why they are happening so you can get past them."

What track holds the most personal significance for you?

"*As The Moon Rests* is a love song, which isn't something I thought I'd ever do. It feels quite uplifting. Even though it's not in a major key or anything, there's an optimism to it. It feels like the conclusion of what we're working on and I like that very much." **H**

AS THE MOON RESTS IS OUT OCTOBER 7 VIA BELLA UNION

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
2

MIXING ENGINEER:
Adrian Hall

STUDIO:
Clever Pup, London

EXPECT:
Soulful, captivating songs that will penetrate your soul



LARS FREDERIKSEN HAS many fingers in many pies. Best known as the guitarist in Berkeley, California punk legends Rancid, he's also in numerous other bands, has his own wrestling podcast called The Wrestling Perspective Podcast, has produced classic albums from the likes of Agnostic Front and Dropkick Murphys, and is also an avid follower of Millwall football club. It's been quite a ride for a snotty punk rock kid, so we caught up with him to ask what he'd learned through it all.

PUNK REALLY ALLOWED ME TO EXPRESS MYSELF

"There was a guy named Sean Gregonis who lived in our neighbourhood. The first time I saw him he was wearing a white t-shirt, had rolled-up jeans and was carrying a boombox listening to X. I wanna even say he had a little dog collar chain like Sid Vicious. My brother became friends with him first; this is like 1979, and we also watched Ramones' *Rock 'N' Roll High School* video together a bunch of times. Where I grew up there weren't many opportunities to express yourself in any way. I gravitated to punk for the shock value. I think I'm a pretty provocative person, and I liked the freedom to say what you wanna say, to dress how you wanna dress."

CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS WISELY...

"The music I make is always staunchly anti-racist, anti-fascist – about acceptance. But weirdly, when we kids, we were all really judgemental as well! We were just teens trying to work the world out and you make mistakes. I think it's sad that the world doesn't let you make mistakes anymore. But I tried to surround myself with friends who had the same moral code and moral compass as me, and all these years later all of my best friends are punks or skinheads still. I'm glad I made sure I surrounded myself with the right people."

AND THE SAME GOES FOR YOUR BANDMATES

"Tim [Armstrong, Rancid vocalist] and I were two peas in a pod; both younger brothers who came from working class families. We could feel that the energy was tangible from the first time we met, we just clicked and became inseparable. My friendship with him helped me to mature. He helped me focus, he would always tell me how I had this talent, and he pushed me. When we started making music together it was like lightning striking, the chemistry that we had. I'll add in Matt [Freeman, Rancid

bassist], Brett [Reed, original Rancid drummer] and Branden [Steineckert, current Rancid drummer] in as well... the speed bumps we hit, the mountains we climbed, the partnership we shared, the moral compass we share. That's what has kept us together."

BE AWARE OF YOUR HISTORY

"One of the first times I understood the gravity of what my mom went through [Lars's mother was the only member of her family to escape the Nazi occupation of Denmark



LIFE LESSONS

LARS FREDERIKSEN

He's Rancid's guitarist (and about a dozen bands' besides) and counts Gene Simmons and Rob Halford among his fans. These are the lessons he values above all others

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: TAYLOR WAHL

during the Second World War and fled to the US], was when I had an American flag that I used to use as a bum flap, and I put swastikas on the stars. This was, like, 1985. I came home and she asked me what I had done to the stars and I said, 'America... blah, blah blah', all the punk shit. She sat me down and explained exactly what that symbol meant to her. I wasn't educated on what my mom had been through, I suddenly understood the gravity. I was using it to be provocative, but over the

"I GRAVITATED TO PUNK FOR THE SHOCK VALUE"

years, understanding what it means, knowing what that meant to her, as well as my own personal experiences with being looked at weird because of how I dressed, made it so clear to me how stupid the idea of hating someone because of their race or sexuality or... whatever is."

WE WENT INTO OUR SHELLS TO RECORD 1995's ...AND OUT COME THE WOLVES

"I don't think that we knew at the time what *...And Out Come the Wolves* was going to do. It was the realest example of where we were and all the chaos around us. We had a little bit of success with [1994's] *Let's Go*, but the heart and soul and energy of making that record was just pure, unbridled joy. We slept at the studio and got up first thing in the morning because we couldn't wait to get started. We didn't know what was going to happen, but we knew we were conscious that we were getting the stuff out of us."

WE OWE A LOT TO MR. BRETT

"The record really took shape when Brett Gurewitz [Epitaph Records founder] came along. [Producer] Jerry Finn had to go and do the Jawbreaker record [1995's *Dear You*], so Brett came along and helped out. We had the essence of what that record was going to be, but Brett really pushed us and told us to re-do vocals. Me and Tim did a new vocal take on *Roots Radical* in the studio while we

were mixing it! It was literally getting made up until the 11th hour... that's why the song is called that! If there is going to be an album for us to be remembered for, then that is a pretty good one."

YOU NEVER KNOW WHO YOUR MUSIC WILL AFFECT

"I knew that punk rock was the coolest music in the world, so the fact that it was getting exposure, for me, was rad! I remember going to see Kiss on their 1996 reunion tour, and Gene Simmons came up to me, as did Rob Halford, picked out *Avenues & Alleyways* and said it was so cool we had written an anti-racist song. The fact that these guys from a completely different world to us knew who we were, not only that but they recited actual lyrics by us... that was the most 'Kaboom!' moment. We grew up listening to Kiss and Judas Priest!"

YOU CAN'T HATE SOMETHING UNLESS YOU UNDERSTAND IT

"We were all from working class families, so when the major labels came sniffing around we had to take that seriously ▶

Punk for life:
Lars Frederiksen





Nazis (punk or otherwise) can fuck off, Lars rightly says

“I WASN’T ALLOWED OFF THE BUS OR I’D HAVE A PUNCH-UP”

and at least speak to them. Just getting out of that neighbourhood was seen as making it; a lot of the guys I knew aren’t with us now. So, we were very aware of the fact that we had to hustle. I know a lot of the punks hated it and thought they were suits and exploitative, and that’s fine, but we had to go find that out for ourselves.”

SUCCESS DOESN’T MEAN YOUR TROUBLES ARE OVER

“Everything happened organically for us. That’s the right way for it to have happened, and we’re still here 30 years later and still pretty relevant. But there were people that didn’t like it, that suddenly treated you differently. I’d get into fights, because people thought I was doing something wrong. I got banned from Florida because these cuckoo-birds were making noise outside of our bus and I went out to fight them with our sound man. They had to put a rule in place where

I just wasn’t allowed off the bus or I’d be out there having a punch-up. But that was my nature; that’s where I came from.”

WE WERE HONOURED TO BE THE INSPIRATION FOR AEW’S RUBY SOHO

“I’m a massive wrestling fan, have been for years, and I have my own podcast. I had been watching Ruby Riott – as she was then known – in the WWE and thought she was awesome. So, when she was released [from WWE], I sent her a message and asked her to come on my podcast. It was the first time she had been interviewed since her release and she was saying that she wanted to keep wrestling but would have to use another name. I was like, ‘Duh! You’re a Rancid fan!’ [So she should name herself after the song, *Ruby Soho*.] It’s a dream come true to have a wrestler come out to one of our songs. To play her out to the ring was as nervous as I’ve ever been in my life!”

THERE’S JUST TOO MUCH DIVISION TODAY

“There’s no meeting in the middle these days, everything is so polarising. When you’ve grown up in this music and you realise that this dystopian future is on us, this divide and conquer [thing], which is as old as dirt, is happening, you don’t want to be part of it. The separation of people because of their race, sex, religion... it’s so fucking stupid! It’s a waste of time. On your death bed you are not going to be going, ‘I’m so glad I made my political point on Twitter!’”

EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS A LESSON

“I’ve gone back to my pagan roots since my mom passed and it’s made me more spiritual. I learned that in everything in life, there is a lesson. Are you going to learn that lesson? That’s the question. Because if you don’t, trust me, you will be asked that same question over and over again. You either grow or stay stagnant. It just made me realise that all of this was so temporary.” ■

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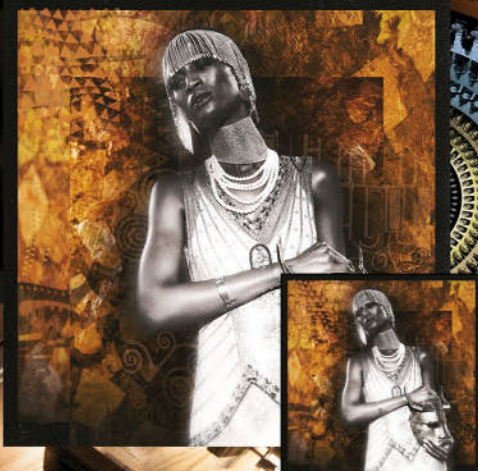


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THE STORY BEHIND

FREAK ON A LEASH KORN

Jonathan Davis reveals how a blizzard of drugs, tension with their record and occasional bouts of physical violence inspired his band to write one of nu metal's greatest anthems

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: BOB BERG/GETTY

KORN FRONTMAN JONATHAN

Davis has a surprisingly clear memory of making Korn's third album, 1998's *Follow The Leader*. Surprising, because of the lifestyle he and his bandmates were living at the time.

"Everyone was out of their fucking minds," recalls Jonathan today. "Alcoholic drug addicts... ha! I just remember all the excess: we're kids, living our rock'n'roll dreams and having the time of our lives."

By that point, Korn could do no wrong. The mutant metal/hip hop/funk mash-up of their self-titled 1994 debut album and 1996 follow-up *Life Is Peachy* had rewired heavy music, opening the door for an army of likeminded bands in the process, among them Deftones, Coal Chamber, Snot and Limp Bizkit.

Bacchanalian extravaganzas aside, the Bakersfield outfit weren't about to rest on their laurels. *Follow The Leader* hit the turbo button on their career, its out-of-the-box success transforming them from metal's most talked-about new band into one of its biggest. And in the album's second single, *Freak On A Leash*, they delivered one of the recently christened 'nu metal' scene's definitive anthems – as well as one of the most memorable videos of the era.

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
1999

ALBUM:
Follow The Leader

PERSONNEL:
Jonathan Davis
(vocals, bagpipes),
Brian 'Head'
Welch (guitar),
Munky (guitar),
Fieldy (bass),
David Silveria
(drums,
percussion)

HIGHEST CHART
POSITION:
2



"*Freak On A Leash* connected with the kids who shot Korn to where they are today," says Jonathan. "There's a lot of great Korn songs, but that's the one most people seemed to hear and really identify with."

Korn were buzzing in every sense of the word after wrapping up the tour in support of *Life Is Peachy*. That record may not have had the shock-of-the-new impact of their debut – and it wasn't as good musically – but it had sold more than a million copies in the US. Were they feeling the pressure of delivering a follow-up that would be even more successful while the competition were biting at their heels? Not a chance.

"We were young, cocky kids," says Jonathan. "We knew we were the kings of that shit and nobody was gonna take that away from us. Also in our heads was that the bands that were emulating us, we took that as a compliment. It was like, 'If you love our shit that much you want to copy it... fuck yeah!'"

Korn's confidence was bulletproof when they entered a small rehearsal room in Redondo Beach, Orange County in the summer of 1997 to write material for *Follow The Leader*. "We'd done two successful albums

but we wanted to push boundaries and go somewhere else," says Jonathan. "Getting in the room together, we just came up with stuff."

One the first things they came up with was *Freak On A Leash*. "Oh, we loved that song from day one," says Jonathan. "I remember coming up with all these lines. It came a lot easier than other songs."

Korn guitarist Brian 'Head' Welch has previously said that the song's title was "sort of a kinky dominatrix thing," but Jonathan insists the meaning was much simpler. This was the singer lashing out at the music industry for the way it treated artists, taking away their personal agency and stripping the whole endeavour of any sense of fun – he was the freak on a leash.

"Even down to our band name, we've always been the guys that are like, 'You don't tell us what to do; this super-punk rock mentality,'" says Jonathan. "We just wanted to do what we wanted to do, and if you tried pushing us one way we'd go another."

With *Freak On A Leash* and the other songs that would appear on *Follow The Leader* in the bag, the band entered LA's NRG Studios in the spring of 1998 to record the album. There was one



Korn (left to right): Munky, Head, Fieldy, Jonathan Davis, David Silveria



significant change in personnel. They'd worked on their first two albums with Ross Robinson, the talismanic producer who played a huge part in shaping the sound of nu metal. This time, though, they elected not to use him.

"It was really scary, but we knew we needed to do something different," says Jonathan. "We didn't have a producer for damn near the whole record, we just had people coming in and out, and we weren't vibing with any of them."

The album would be credited to two producers, Steve Thompson – who bailed after a few weeks due to "personal stuff" – and Alice In Chains associate Toby Wright, who saw *Follow The Leader* across the line. Sessions were chaotic – at one point, Jonathan refused to sing unless Toby brought him an 'eight-ball' of cocaine (roughly three-and-a-half grams).

The singer hadn't completely cut his ties with Ross Robinson. He briefly brought the producer in to act as his vocal coach during the *Follow The Leader* sessions. Ross's previous approach to

coaxing a vocal performance out of Jonathan was a mix of mind-games and violence that bordered on the physical. This was no exception.

"*Freak On A Leash* was where Ross was digging his nails into my back!" remembers Jonathan. "That was some weird shit, real fucked-up. Once I got to that moment I was like, 'I'm done with this, this is fucking stupid.'"

While *Freak On A Leash* was instantly recognisable as a Korn song, it played with the formula as Jonathan had suggested. The track began with guitarist Munky wringing strange, high-pitched noises out of his instrument while Jonathan whispered the track's opening line: 'Something takes a part of me' – a pot-shot at the music industry that the singer had grown to resent. When the chorus kicked in with Fieldy's gigantic clacking bass sound, it was as funky as Faith No More in their peak and as filthy-sounding as any grunge band.

Yet the most memorable moment came two-and-a-half minutes in.

Korn were never a guitar solo kind of band anyway, and where most other bands would have dropped in a solo, *Freak On A Leash* stopped for a scat-style vocal breakdown from Jonathan.

"We were jamming and I started mixing beatboxing and this scat thing I do," says the singer. "I loved vocal percussion – dudes like [old-school rapper] Doug E. Fresh and his beatboxing from back in the day. I listened to a lot of old school hip hop and New York freestyle – that's what I listened to with all the 80s new wave stuff."

Follow The Leader was released on August 18, 1998, selling more than a quarter of a million copies in the US in its first week and peaking at No.1 on the Billboard charts (it would eventually be certified five times platinum). *Freak On A Leash* was the album's second single, following *Got The Life*. It was accompanied by a spectacular, part-animated video, directed by acclaimed comic book artist Todd McFarlane (who was also responsible for the album's cover).

The clip follows the path of a bullet accidentally discharged from a cop's handgun as it flies through a suburban neighbourhood and into a Korn poster, where it begins to careen around the band as they perform in a darkened room that's illuminated only by light streaming through holes in the walls. Midway through the song, Jonathan yells, 'Go!' and the bullet reverses its trajectory, eventually ending up in the cop's hand. The video cost upwards of \$800,000 to make.

"EVERYONE WAS OUT OF THEIR FUCKING MINDS. ALCOHOLIC DRUG ADDICTS..."

JONATHAN DAVIS

“ROSS ROBINSON WAS DIGGING HIS NAILS INTO MY BACK. THAT WAS SOME WEIRD SHIT, REAL FUCKED-UP”

JONATHAN DAVIS

“I felt like how the producers of *The Matrix* felt when they were handed the script to that movie: ‘We’re gonna use this technology that doesn’t exist to make this movie,’” says Jonathan. “We showed up and there was the big box with all these light holes in it, which is where we shot the performance part – that was all we saw. We were on tour in Australia, and they beamed [the finished video] to our hotel room on satellite TV. We watched it together, and our jaws hit the floor.”

Freak On A Leash was already a hit with Korn fans by the time it was released as a single in February 1999 – it was the very first song the band played on the landmark Family Values tour, which had kicked off the previous September. By that point, Jonathan Davis had quit booze and drugs, realising that the potential outcome if he didn’t could have been dire.

“I took it too far,” he says of the partying. “It was time to stop the stupid shit or I was going to die. I had a child and things to do, so the things that happened helped me get sober.”

Today, *Freak On A Leash* remains Korn’s most popular track, with more than 300 million Spotify plays and almost as many YouTube views. In 2006, they teamed up with Evanescence’s Amy Lee for a startling, string-led version on *MTV Unplugged*.

“The whole experience was amazing,” says Jonathan of the collaboration. “We practised for months, we brought in one of my dearest friends, Richard Gibbs, who helped arrange all the strings – we knew we wanted to take it over the top and do something different. Getting Amy to do that song was amazing.”

“When I wrote *Freak On A Leash*, I was a kid and very emotional,” he continues. “It was a snapshot of where we were at the time, but lo and behold, after that record we never had to depend on a record label again. That was the vehicle to get where we are now, so playing that song these days represents that time period and what I was going through. It took us off the leash!” **H**

KORN’S ALBUM *REQUIEM* IS OUT NOW VIA LOMA VISTA

Jonathan Davis: the titular freak on a leash

KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

"HORROR MOVIE PARADISE" -POLYGON

SHUDDER

SO GOOD IT'S SCARY



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YOUR SHOUT

MORE LIKE FIVE FINGER METH-PUNCH

...and other bizarre appellations, proclamations and musings you had on Five Finger Death Punch, Jinjer, Amon Amarth and more popping up in the pages of last month's issue

FIVE FINGER MEH PUNCH

Five finger dork punks.
Art Jensen, Facebook

We hope you didn't spend too much time trying to think of that one, Art. It's... not good.

MAD-EYE MOODY

Nobody is pretending 5FDP are the most profound band about, but they do make a hell of a lot of people happy. Not sure what's going on with Ivan's eyepatch though – makes them look more like Five Finger Meth-Punch.
Liv Matthews, email

They certainly do, Liv. Though we're not sure they'll be happy about the put-down considering the eyepatch is medicinal...



Tatiana Shmayluk: incredible

IVAN SOOTHES ME

It was so good to see an article that shows the dark side of addiction, and that it is never too late to get sober. As well as showing the public that success can be achieved or sustained.

Thank you to Five Finger Death Punch's Ivan Moody for being so open about sobriety and its ups and downs!
Joshua Mueller, Facebook
Exactly, Joshua. You can say what you want about

Five Finger Death Punch (and, judging from our social comments, most of you lot will), but Ivan has never backed down from talking about his fight with addiction and mental health.

WIN-JER

So great to see Tatiana Shmayluk back in the pages of *Hammer*. Jinjer are an incredible band with an incredible story; they really should be on the cover.

Yusef Z., email

You're absolutely right Yusef, the level of perseverance Jinjer have shown repeatedly is truly inspiring. And they already have had a cover – as part of a special bundle in September last year...

S.O.D. THIS

Listening to Stormtroopers Of Death as a 15 year-old in the mad 80s I did not get any sense of irony or satire. We were just hella more racist, misogynistic and homophobic back then. Sure, it was also a very funny side-project and the music absolutely ruled, but the lyrics by today's standards are absolutely monstrous.

Rebecca Burrridge, Facebook



Five Finger Death Punch: divisive, to say the least

#TWEETS

I seriously can't wait to eventually do a tour with @ITHACABAND and mic grab every fucking night
The Callous Daoboy
(@callousdaoboy)

@burytomorrow is my coffee in the morning
Mark Highdale
(@MarkHighdale)

Fancy long words I learned because of Slipknot's *Iowa* album: "megalomaniacal" "thalidomide" "connptions" "dejected morbid progeny" "nepotistic negligence"
Serena Cherry, Svalbard/Noctule
(@whatacoolfride)

Occult museums should be occult museums and not just edgefests
Backxwash
(@backxwash)

Managed to get a Reddit page dedicated to a conversation about Is Venom Prison Heavy Metal. Absolutely killing it this week.
Ash Gray, Venom Prison
(@ashkgray)



BIG DEBATE

Pantera's two surviving members, Phil Anselmo and Rex Brown, announced their intention to tour as Pantera in 2023 – but not everyone is excited...

WE SAID

"In a new report by Billboard, Anselmo and Brown are said to have signed with Artist Group International for the tour. Artist Group International representative Peter Pappalardo has released a statement on the reunion to Billboard, stating: "We are thrilled to be working with such an iconic band and bringing their music to the fans."

YOU SAY

Bring it on!!! Philip Anselmo & The Illegals have been performing Pantera songs live and they're great.

Kate Moffatt, Facebook

This isn't Pantera, it's a few racist arseholes who want money for pretending they are Pantera. Fuck them. There's no place in metal for this shite.

Adam, Twitter

The music should be played. They shouldn't call it Pantera, though. Something, something... the MUSIC of Pantera, yes.

Tommy Clark, Facebook

Huge Pantera fan. Yes I would. With gusto!

Rock N Balls, Twitter

Idk man, Vinnie and Dime were the biggest part of the Pantera sound, depends on how they put it out there, is it a "reform" or a tribute to fallen brothers? Because I know which one I'd prefer it to be.

Jake Edward Holt, Facebook

I like it. It brings Pantera to a new generation. Plus if you didn't get to see them ever it's still great.

Jason Steffen, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/ GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

Our social values have definitely advanced over the last 40 years, Rebecca – and rightly so.

THEY TOOK MY KK AWAY

Fuck yeah, loved the Judas Priest feature on *Screaming For Vengeance*. It was great reading Rob and Ian's recollections. I understand why Glenn wasn't included, but no KK? Aren't they all buddies now?

Joey Morgan, Facebook

Sadly we couldn't make it work getting hold of KK as well as Rob and Ian, but we're very glad you liked the feature!

IOWA APOLOGY

Thought Vended got a big feature just because they're related to members of Slipknot, but fair fucks,

proper old-school vibe, even if it is massively like their dads' music.

Dom Richards, Twitter

Wait, are you saying Slipknot are 'old school'?! Are we OLD? Dear god, someone grab our Zimmer frame.

HEL IN A CELL

All those questions between Amon Amarth and Erick Redbeard, but nobody thought to ask the most important question of all: who'd win in a fight between a horde of Vikings and the current roster of AEW?

Jade Wall, Facebook

We might have to hand in our journal cards over this, although Vikings have axes, arrows, swords and just about every other pointy implement you'd care to name, so the fight would probably be pretty one-sided.

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers



MACHINE HEAD

Of Kingdom And Crown
"The music and concept are as epic as the title. Machine Fucking Head rule!"

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR



HEILUNG

Drif

"Not so much an album as a vast, brain-retuning soundworld to explore"

JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR



MACHINE HEAD

Of Kingdom And Crown
"YES! Fast, furious, fucking awesome! *careers around the lounge, trying to start a circle-pit with the cat!"

VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR



MACHINE HEAD

Of Kingdom And Crown
"New Machine Head? Let's go!"

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

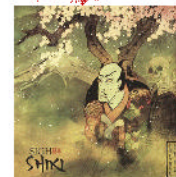


THE HALO EFFECT

Days of The Lost

"Gothenburg magic made arena-sized again – what more could you want?"

RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

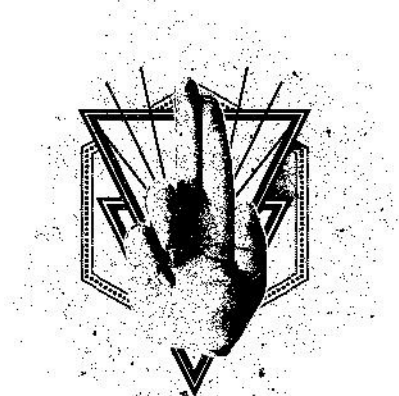


SIGH

Shiki

"Japanese avant-garde metal kings, as reliably unique as ever"

DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



NEW NOISE

THE HALO EFFECT

Meet the melodeath supergroup bringing the Gothenburg sound back into arenas

WORDS: MATT MILLS

ASK YOUR AVERAGE Joe about Gothenburg and they wouldn't have much to say. It's a Swedish city that's home to some 500,000 people and countless examples of piercing Scandinavian architecture. Ask a metalhead about Gothenburg and they'll hail it as the land of melodic death metal: the genre that bridged death metal's extremities with the guitar-god flamboyance of Iron Maiden, and ultimately inspired world-conquering titans like Killswitch Engage and Trivium.

"Gothenburg is a pretty small city," says Mikael Stanne. "And the metal community there was tiny. Everybody knew everybody else. There were two record stores where you'd have to wait for them to import whatever album you wanted. Nobody knew, or expected, that anything like what happened there would happen."

Mikael wasn't just there when the genre got off the ground. He pioneered it, both as the vocalist of scene idols In Flames and the guitarist, later also frontman, of Dark Tranquillity: a band he's now led for more than 30 years. Mikael's new band, The Halo Effect, is an unabashed celebration of the scene he grew up in.

Every member – Mikael, guitarists Jesper Strömblad and Niclas Engelin, bassist Peter Iwers and drummer Daniel Svensson – is a Gothenburg veteran with a tenure in In Flames.

And their debut album, *Days Of The Lost*, is no-frills melodeath. Over 10 songs, it flaunts all the shreds and growled yet infectious choruses that these men used three decades ago to put the world on notice.

"We are a band of our own in a world of our own," declares Niclas. "When we started [The Halo Effect], we knew we wanted to do this, but what kind of music do we have in us? Should we go prog-ish and weird? Then Peter came up with the riff for *Gateways*, which I developed into a song, and we went, 'Hey, this is quite familiar.' We didn't overthink stuff; we just went with the flow and didn't stop that train of inspiration."

Individually, The Halo Effect's members have known each other forever. Mikael met Niclas in 1991, when the singer was in an outfit called Septic Broiler and supported the guitarist's teenage band, Sarcasm, at a local club. Niclas and Jesper started their first band together in high school, Mikael and Daniel were classmates, and Mikael met Peter through his older brother: ex-Dark Tranquillity bassist Anders Iwers.

However, this band didn't kick off until 2019. Peter and Daniel started jamming together in their downtime, before inviting Niclas to join them. Niclas then got Mikael involved.

"We started talking, like, 'Hey, we should do something together,' like you

do after a few beers," smiles Mikael. "Then you realise that, of course, you don't have time for anything like that, but it still sounds fun. But I was in, because I was really in writing mode. I was just finishing all the lyrics for the latest DT album [2020's *Moment*]. I was sitting here writing anyway and screaming into a microphone, so I was like, 'Yeah, send me some stuff and I'll see what I can do.'"

Lyricaly, Mikael took inspiration for *Days Of The Lost* from the other members of the band. Throughout the album, he roars about the collective's near-lifelong relationship with metal. Themes range from the moment heavy music first inspired them as teenagers to the throes of band in-fighting and line-up changes that they've had to endure to keep the dream alive.

"It's everything we've talked about and experienced over the years," he elaborates. "What was it about this subculture and this community that

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

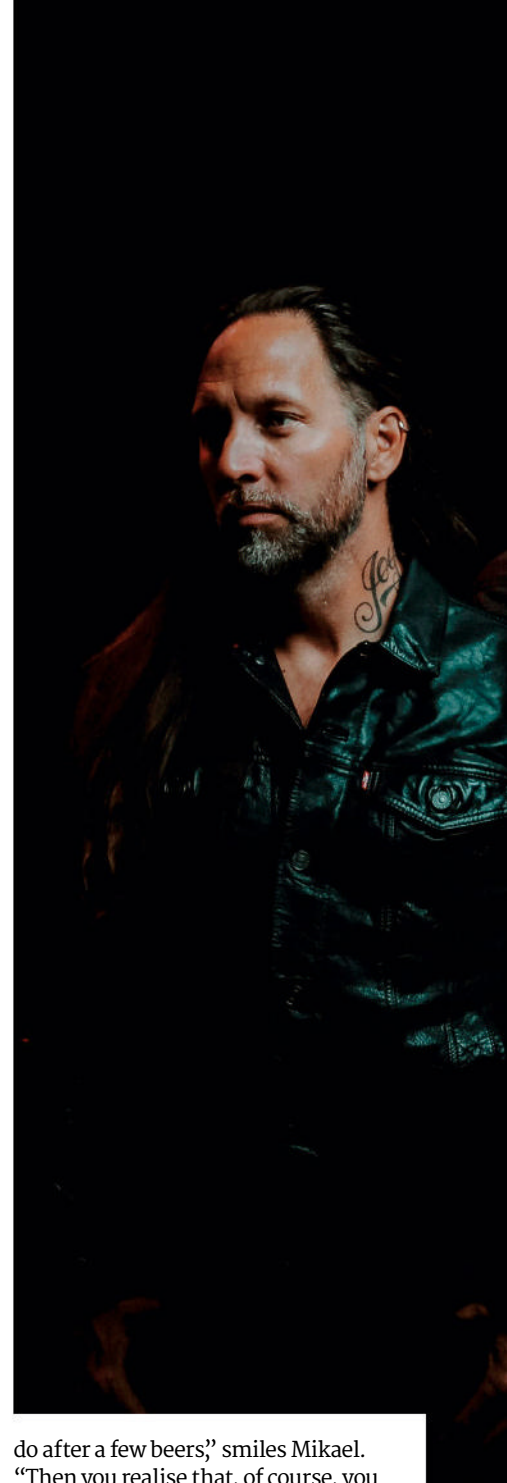
1995 Gothenburg thrust into 2022, with massive melodic licks and earworm choruses galore

FOR FANS OF:

In Flames, Dark Tranquillity, Arch Enemy

LISTEN TO:

Shadowminds



PRESS/LUCAS ENGLUND



The embers are still burning in this In Flames Old Boys Club

was so attractive and meaningful to us? We were just weirdos trying to find our way and, eventually, metal found us. But then the album also deals with when communication breaks down: when two parties want the exact same thing, but you have totally different ideas on how to get there. That's happened to all of us, butting heads with another creative person."

With every member of The Halo Effect having left In Flames, it's an idea that they're all familiar with. It's freshest for Niclas, whose status with the band is still up in the air. He took a leave of absence in February 2019 and has yet to return, with ex-Megadeth guitarist Chris Broderick replacing him first on the road, as well as on new single *State Of Slow Decay*. Niclas refuses to clarify whether or not he's still in the band when we ask him.

In fact, talk about In Flames whatsoever seems to be keenly avoided. Watch the YouTube video for *Shadowminds* and underneath you'll find a torrent of comments comparing

"WE WERE JUST WEIRDOS TRYING TO MAKE OUR WAY"

MIKAEL STANNE

the two bands. "More In Flames members than In Flames themselves. Incredible," one writes. Another says: "Finally! An album by In Flames! We haven't had one since *Clayman*."

"Everybody has an opinion," Mikael diplomatically responds, "and that's awesome! I have no problem at all,

as long as people are civil. All the negative comments on Blabbermouth and YouTube, I don't like those."

The Halo Effect's stock is already sky-high, with *Shadowminds* boasting 2 million streams and the band primed for a UK run with Machine Head and Amon Amarth in arenas this autumn. Mikael insists, "We're gonna make this band work."

Good. Thanks to a mix of pedigree, stellar songs and a supersized tour on the horizon, The Halo Effect are the most talked-about melodeath band since the golden age of Gothenburg. ■

DAYS OF THE LOST IS OUT ON AUGUST 12 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. THE HALO EFFECT TOUR THE UK WITH MACHINE HEAD AND AMON AMARTH IN SEPTEMBER

NEW NOISE INHUMAN CONDITION

Death metal veterans team up to breathe fresh horror into the classic DM sound

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURES: DEIDRA KLING



WHEN TAYLOR NORDBERG

(Deicide) and Jeramie Kling (Venom Inc/Ex Deo) abruptly departed Florida death metal crew Massacre in 2020, they were in possession of an entire new album's worth of neck-wrecking songs that no longer had a home. Determined not to waste perfectly good brutality, they joined forces with another former Massacre member, legendary bassist Terry Butler (Obituary/ex-Death), and formed Inhuman Condition: a band named after a Massacre EP from the 90s. Simple.

"We didn't want any confusion about why this band sounded like Massacre," Jeramie explains. "We figured, let's eliminate that thought right out of the gate. When we told Terry about the name he loved it and said, 'I actually wrote that song so this is perfect!'"

Much less nice are the barbarous riffs and broken-glass bellowing that await listeners on Inhuman Condition's second album, *Fearsick*. Arriving only a year after the trio's *Rat's God* debut, it combines the last of the songs Jeramie and Taylor

wrote for their previous band with a bunch of equally vicious, bone-chilling new shit.

"I kept thinking of the term 'dopesick' and what that means, and how debilitating that can be," explains

Jeramie. "Then I considered how many people are literally crippled with fear. Fear of being alive, fear of bugs, fear of anything your heart desires. I put those two things together and it tied the entire album's lyrical content together with a nice bow. Fear makes us do lots of wacky stuff. It makes us feel lots of different things. It makes ghosts real."

Despite all being involved with multiple projects, Inhuman Condition seem to have sprouted the necessary legs to make this spontaneous union a longer-term concern. Death metal: still the best time ever.

"We just play the music we like," Jeramie concludes. "Plans for next year are being made as we speak. We're having way too much fun!" **H**

FEARSICK IS OUT NOW VIA LISTENABLE INSANITY

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Balls-out, old-school death metal, played by experts

FOR FANS OF: Massacre, Benediction, Cancer

CHECK OUT: *Recycled Hate*



GRAYWAVE

Meet the one-woman project escaping reality with shoegaze and dream-pop

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL

"I WANT TO make music that other people can find solace in, without there being a defined message." Graywave, aka Birmingham's Jess Webberley, sees her music as consoling, but open to interpretation. Straddling the line between swirling shoegaze and dreampop, she folds in elements from Slowdive to Cocteau Twins.

Graywave released her debut EP, *Planetary Shift*, back in April 2021, but her second, *Rebirth*, is something of a departure from her previous work. "It's about changing directions," she tells us. "The red and orange [of the artwork] represents the phoenix, and the ghostly figures are morphing into something new."

Inner turmoil is a key theme in her music. She explains: "It's reflected in a lot of my material, light versus dark and good versus evil," but it also reflects an "indecision of who I am and who I want to be".

Such multi-faceted music has caught the eye of underground tastemakers Church Road Records and will see her play shows with labelmates Zetra and Heriot (Debbie Gough, Heriot's guitarist/vocalist, recommended Church Road to her). Although her music is serene on the surface, she feels it's a natural bedfellow for the hardcore bands she grew up playing in and enjoying, and with shoegaze cropping up in bands from Deftones to Loathe, she's got a good point. **H**

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: A dip into an ethereal, shimmering dream realm

FOR FANS OF: Cocteau Twins, Loathe, Slowdive

LISTEN TO: *Rebirth*

REBIRTH IS OUT NOW VIA CHURCH ROAD

ANIIMALIA

Alt rockers looking to conquer the world, one radio at a time

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT • PICTURES: LUKE SHADRICK

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Kate Bush-style eccentricity colliding with radio rock riff-raft

FOR FANS OF:

Biffy Clyro, Marmozets, Vukovi

LISTEN TO:

Silver Linings

ANIIMALIA – DELIBERATELY

misspelt Latin for ‘animals’ – formed in Somerset, England in 2020, intent on challenging the notion that a band can’t be both idiosyncratic and have mass appeal. Their sound is a yin-yang amalgamation of the heavier tendencies of acts like Royal Blood and Biffy Clyro, and the quirky eccentricity of bands like Marmozets or Yonaka.

“We don’t fit into a box,” vocalist Kira Beckett admits. “We’ve been told to simplify what we do to find our place in the industry, but that completely goes against the feeling of our band.”

Their instincts proved to be correct when they won the Marshall x Kerrang! Radio ‘The Deal’ competition earlier this year. They landed a record deal with Marshall, as well as radio airplay and a slot at this year’s Download



festival (“the best experience we’ve had so far”). The competition certainly gave them a leg up, and they aren’t taking it for granted.

“We’ve been so busy, sometimes it genuinely doesn’t hit us what an insane opportunity this has been,” Kira says. “We couldn’t be more grateful for the people around us.”

With new EP *Pressure Points* highlighting the polarity in their

sound – just listen to the nimble guitar-work of *False Enemy* or the enormous chorus of *Silver Linings* – Aniimalia have set their sights on the future. “We’re in this for the long run,” Kira asserts. “We want to push ourselves as far as we can go.”

PRESSURE POINTS IS DUE OUT ON AUGUST 19 VIA MARSHALL



INFANTERIA

The South African hopefuls taking 80s thrash and sprinkling in modern prog and metalcore

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER • PICTURES: KATE HIBBERD

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Spotty 80s thrash boys becoming sexy modern prog men

FOR FANS OF:

Metallica, Mastodon, Architects

LISTEN TO:

Raging Bastards

WHEN SOUTH AFRICAN prog-thrash alchemists Infanteria recorded their second album, *Where Serpents Conquer*, in 2015, they were in a mad rush to make a record after storming Wacken and supporting Killswitch and Trivium. “We nearly killed ourselves doing the last one so quickly,” reveals singer/guitarist Chris Hall. “This time we thought, let’s be more meticulous.”

The refinement is evident in the elegant, expansive arrangements of third album *Patriarch*. The cerebral concept unifying lyrics and aesthetic – of “family legacies of the past that hang over the present” – confirms Infanteria’s direction of travel.

“We went more progressive,” affirms Chris. “I love the way Mastodon and Opeth take you on a journey. I wanted to add a bit of Architects’ and While She Sleeps’ ethereal wall of noise thing too.”

“I’m a lot more relaxed, not as busy,” ponders drummer Adrian Langeveld. “Less crazy, but still big, and not overplayed. I could compare it to going from *...And Justice For All* to *The Black Album*.”

“As your tastes broaden you want to incorporate more of the things you connect with and make them your own,” says bassist Tim Leibbrandt. “I think we’ve done that successfully.”

PATRIARCH IS OUT NOW

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

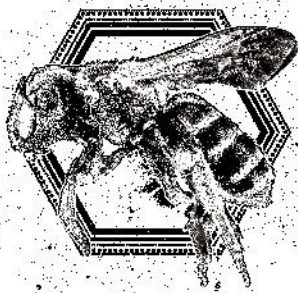


GREAT AMERICAN GHOST

“Great American Ghost were recently out on tour with Fit For An Autopsy. I think they’re one of the heaviest, coolest, scariest live bands that I’ve heard and seen.”

MATTHEW KIICHI HEAFY, TRIVIUM/IBARAKI





HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month



HEILUNG DRIF - WOOD BOX

SEASON OF MIST

£167

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN Heilung's latest slice of 'amplified history' in the most stylish way possible with this lavish box set. Limited to a mere 500 copies, the band's triumphant new opus is splashed across two handsome slabs of marbled vinyl, which come sheathed in an engraved wooden box and packed alongside a 128-page book of writings, ruminations and illustrations. In case you fancy decoding your own runes there's also a deluxe notebook, plus nine screenprinted tarot cards should you wish to foretell your own fate. With that all jammed in there we're not sure if there's space for much else – certainly not yer antlers (besides, they might scratch the vinyl), and likely not even the blanched knucklebones you've taken to using as a percussion instrument.

tinyurl.com/drif-wood



THE HU T-SHIRT

£25

Nothing says 'Mongolian folk rock' quite like a leopard's face bursting from an electric sphincter. The Hu's second album, *Rumble Of Thunder*, is released in September; rep it with pride with this crazy t-shirt.

tinyurl.com/thunder-tee



DARTH VADER CONTROLLER STAND

£30.30

David Prowse may have followed his second greatest role (Green Cross Code Man, c'mon!) into the Force, but his telekinetic powers are celebrated here. Don't be surprised if your controller starts floating into his arms.

tinyurl.com/vader-stand



LOST BOYS DR MARTENS

£129

Know what we crave more than death by stereo? A pair of these sweet, fang-embazoned *Lost Boys* kicks. Squint hard enough and you can almost imagine that the faux croc detailing is actually batwing, too.

tinyurl.com/lostboys-shoes


BEETLEJUICE DRESS
£46.99

Michael Keaton might not be able to pull this dress off, but that doesn't mean you can't give it a go. It's a Beetlejuice-styled A-line number replete with custom buttons, patches, zips and prints.

tinyurl.com/beetle-dress

RATTLESNAKES CARD GAME
£15

Punk legend Frank Carter and fellow Rattlesnake Dean Richardson have rustled up their own card game, Halves. If you're feeling fruity, you can snag some punk and NSFW expansion packs.

tinyurl.com/halves-cards

DAN TOMPKINS LIQUID HYPE DIPA
£28.99

No matter how fruity you are feeling, it's still probably not as fruity, or as lethal, as this 8.6% double IPA produced by with Tesseract frontman Dan Tompkins and Alpha Delta Brewery. Guaranteed to leave you in ruins.

tinyurl.com/dipa-and-dan

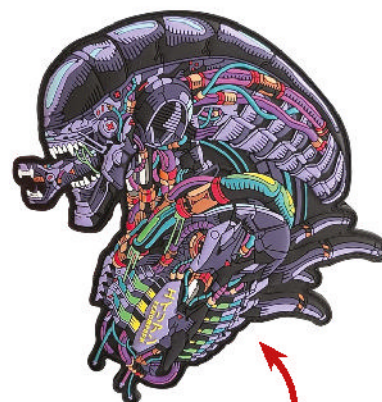
DRAGON BATTLE SKIRT PATTERN
£36.50

You can't really slay a dragon nowadays. It's like killing a swan, but bigger. Sidestep the legalities/unrealities with this downloadable pattern kit, giving you everything you need to print and assemble a 3D, life-size battle skirt.

tinyurl.com/dragon-skirt

BLACKEST ACRYLIC PAINT
£24.99/£99.99

Blackest of the black. Blacker than Necrobutcher's coffee. British artist Stuart Semple created Black 3.0 to rival the exclusive, dumb-as-fuck Vantablack – Black 3.0 absorbs up to 99% of light, which is a steal for 25 quid.

tinyurl.com/blackest-black

XENO MECHA PATCH
£16.60/£46

Jazz up your battlejacket with this fresh riff on H.R. Giger's terrifying xenomorph creature. You can get it embroidered, on springy rubber or, for the win, as an ultra-limited glow-in-the-dark edition.

tinyurl.com/xeno-patch

STRANGER THINGS LEATHER JACKET
£83.99

Only squares and mouthbreathers side with the moral majority when there's a Satanic panic, so pick the right side with this jacket. S'fake leather, too, so no demogorgons were harmed in its manufacture.

tinyurl.com/hellfire-leather

ELDEN RING POT
£62.70

Here's a simple way to check whether you're in too deep with *Elden Ring*: do you need – like, really, really, need – a replica of Alexander The Iron Fist the 'living jar' in which to keep your knick-knacks?

tinyurl.com/elden-pot

WITCHCRAFT COLLAR
£14.99

Seen *The Craft* more times than is healthy? Then get your pentagram on in style with a devilish chain collar that'll leave no one wondering whether you prefer to travel the left-hand path.

tinyurl.com/witchcraft-collar

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“IT’S A DARK RECORD. IT’S FUCKING *BLACK*”

The press condemned Machine Head’s last album, *Catharsis*, and then half the band quit. Robb Flynn would have been forgiven for giving up. Instead, he’s made his finest statement in 15 years

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN





As Robb Flynn flickers into view on our now obligatory Zoom call (plain, white background, nothing else on screen), he looks happier and healthier than he has in years. Despite losing half of his band back in 2018, when long-time members Dave McClain and Phil Demmel departed on largely amicable terms, Robb has never been more optimistic about the future – and for one reason in particular.

As a follow-up to 2018's diverse but divisive *Catharsis*, Machine Head are about to release a new album that, at the very least, is their best since 2007's *The Blackening*. The band's first concept album, *Of Kingdom And Crown*, is lean, mean, focused and ferociously heavy. If the initial and overwhelmingly positive online response to new songs *Choke On The Ashes Of Your Hate* and *Unhallowed* is any indication, Machine Head fans are about to lose their goddamn minds.

"I've got really thick skin, especially after the *Catharsis* cycle," Robb grins. "My skin is three inches thick. The *Catharsis* cycle was like nothing I've ever dealt with from the metal media. It was really un-fucking-believable. But at this point, I'm just doing my thing. I've got a couple of buddies, close friends of mine, and I'll ask them to give me the pulse, you know? Is there a good vibe? With this album, they were like, 'Dude! Oh my god, people are freaking out!' Everybody seems stoked. That's a first in three decades! Ha ha ha!"

The departure of Dave McClain and Phil Demmel from Machine Head in 2018 could easily have spelled the end for the band. Or at least it could have done, if Robb Flynn wasn't one of the most fiercely driven, intense and passionate musicians in the entire metal world. Anyone that predicted Machine Head would fizzle out, or perhaps that Robb would embark on a solo career, is guilty of underestimating the man.

"Well, literally on the day that they quit, I started writing [2020 single] *Bulletproof*! Ha ha ha! You know, I was crying in my hot tub and sad about things, and I just started coming up with riffs."

Before the two halves of Machine Head went their separate ways, they had the small matter of a major US tour to complete. As Robb explains, the subsequent shows gave him and the fans the chance to give Dave and Phil a fitting send-off, while also bringing in a much-needed chunk of change for all concerned. What could have been awkward and fractious turned out to be a solidly rewarding experience.

"We went on tour for nine weeks, lived on a bus together, ate dinner together, hung out at bars and drank together,"

"I HAVE GOT REALLY THICK SKIN AFTER THE CATHARSIS CYCLE"

says Robb. "It was different, but it also *wasn't*. Many of the shows were great. I know there's been a bunch of stuff said after the fact, not from my part but from other people [Phil Demmel has made disparaging comments about Robb in several interviews], but for me, we ended it in a very classy way. I got the audience every night to give it up for Phil and Dave and for everything they've brought to the band – all the good times, all the good shows, all the great music. We ended it on a classy note and that's all you can really ask for."

Machine Head played their final show with the departing duo in Santa Cruz on November 24, 2018. Many people in

Machine Fucking Head (left to right): Vogg, Matt Alston, Robb Flynn, Jared MacEachern





Robb's position would have then taken some time to regroup and plan a next move. But as he reveals, Machine Head's next move was well underway long before the bus wheels stopped rolling.

"Halfway through that tour, Jared [MacEachern] and I went into a studio in North Carolina, because we had a couple days off. It was like, 'Let's just write. Let's just go into the studio and see what comes up.' We ended up coming up with the music for *My Hands Are Empty* [another 2020 single and also on *Of Kingdom And Crown*]. So it was as early as that. I just wanted to stay busy, I just wanted to focus on work and writing music. I didn't need to think about the future."

In fact, the next thing Machine Head did was to think about the past. Kicking off in Freiburg, Germany, in October 2019, the *Burn My Eyes* 25th Anniversary Tour reunited Robb with former members guitarist Logan Mader and drummer Chris Kontos, for a nightly, front-to-back run-through of the band's classic debut.

At this stage, via their *An Evening With...* format, Machine Head were routinely playing for in excess of three hours each night. Consequently, Robb had to assemble a second line-up to play a couple of hours of non-*Burn My Eyes* bangers, this time featuring himself and Jared alongside guitarist Vogg of Polish death metal heavyweights Decapitated, and drummer Matt Alston, formerly of UK black metallers Eastern Front. A potential logistical nightmare, the twin-line-up shows turned out to be a roaring success, and the new Machine Head line-up was road-tested and ready for action.

"Yeah, it was a very unusual situation, and it was awesome! Jamming with Logan and Kontos again for the first time was so cool, and there were literally *magical* nights with them onstage. Getting to reconnect with them was amazing. When

"I'M A HUGE MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE FAN"

it came to Matt and Vogg, it comes down to personalities a lot. You know, it's 'Can I live with this person for 20 months on a bus, which is basically an apartment on wheels?' I already knew I could live with Matt because I'd already done it for a year and a half when he was my drum tech. For the first year I didn't even know he played drums! Ha ha ha! But he was always super-mellow and easy."

Robb goes on to explain that Vogg had been in his thoughts after being bombarded with Decapitated's music at the gym ("I call it the death metal gym, it's super-hardcore!"). After exchanging a few emails and attending each other's shows over the years, the two guitarists eventually had a conversation that led to Vogg asking if Robb would consider him for the new Machine Head line-up. Not surprisingly, the audition process quickly clicked into gear and, one song later, Robb knew he had his man.

"Vogg sent over this test of [him playing] *Imperium*, and my guy sent it to me, saying, 'Dude, holy shit!' I watched it and, oh my god, *never* has anybody played a Machine Head song better than me, but here I am watching Vogg playing *Imperium* better than I can, just *killing* it. So we gave him the rest of the tracks and he just killed those too. I knew he was a road dog. He's been on the road since he was young. So I basically hired him without even having jammed with him. Eventually I *am* jamming with him, and I was thinking, 'Wow, I feel like I've been playing with this dude for my whole life.'"

The *Burn My Eyes* tour came to an abrupt halt in February 2020. Exhilarated by the experience, Robb continued work

Robb Flynn: loving life





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“HE GOES ON A MURDEROUS RAMPAGE”

on new material that would emerge as a flurry of standalone singles and EPs during the rest of that year. Robb notes that those songs – *Circle The Drain*, the aforementioned *Bulletproof*, *Stop The Bleeding* (featuring Killswitch Engage’s Jesse Leach), *My Hands Are Empty* and *Do Or Die* – were all about sustaining momentum and keeping the creative juices flowing.

“At first, all I wanted to do was put out songs. I didn’t want to focus on a record,” he states. “I felt a record would take too much time. I love that we’re in an age where I can record a song today and everyone can hear it tomorrow. I wanted to have a constant stream of music coming out – one song, two songs, whatever the case may be. Yes, I guess it’s unconventional and weird, and it was confusing to some people, but I thought it was awesome. It did exactly what I wanted it to do, which was to keep people engaged with Machine Head, instead of waiting four years for an album.”

As much as it was lovely of Robb to keep us occupied over the last few years, the wait for a full-length Machine Head album is over at last. The even better news is that *Of Kingdom And Crown* is an absolute beast and a nailed-on album of the year contender. A brutal and bruising hour of some of the heaviest and most anthemic songs the band have ever released, it tells the story of two troubled protagonists in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, and how their lives collide with bloody, morally complex consequences. If *Catharsis* was too much of a disparate splurge of ideas for some, *Of Kingdom And Crown* is the cohesive and compelling antidote.

“I’ve talked about doing a concept album for years,” Robb admits. “To me, most of the time they’re done not very well, but when they are done well, magical. I was crazy about *The Wall* [by Pink Floyd] when I was a kid. I loved *Operation: Mindcrime* by Queensrÿche. I’m a huge My Chemical Romance fan and I loved *The Black Parade*. That’s a desert island record for me. My wife Genevra is really into the story of *The Black Parade*, and she kept saying ‘You should do a concept record, it’d be killer!’ I said, ‘Well it’s a big undertaking but I’ll give it a shot!’ and it was such a cool experience.”

Initial reports about *Of Kingdom And Crown* seemed to imply that the record was directly inspired by an anime TV series called *Attack On Titan*. Robb is at pains to correct the record, noting that while he shares his teenage sons’ enthusiasm for anime and sci-fi in general (“Oh, I’m a total nerd!” he beams), the new Machine Head album tells its own story, with just a hint of *...Titan*’s morally ambiguous narrative thrown in.

“The thing that was fascinating to me in *Attack On Titan* is that unlike the traditional American story arc, which is a good guy and a bad guy, good versus bad, there was no good guy and no bad guy. Both sides believed they were doing the right thing, but both sides were committing evil atrocities, and that was fascinating to me.”

For clarity’s sake, Robb provides us with a brief summary of the story behind *Of Kingdom And Crown*. “There’s character number one, named Ares [pronounced Aries]. He loses the love of his life, Amethyst, and goes on a murderous rampage against the perpetrators who killed her. Character number two, named Eros [pronounced Arrows], he is the perpetrator, the one who killed Amethyst. He loses his mother to a drug overdose, and in his downward spiral, he becomes radicalised by this charismatic leader and he



goes on his own murderous rampage. The lyrics detail how their lives intertwine.”

This is new territory for Machine Head and for their chief lyricist in particular. According to Robb, the only song that Machine Head have ever recorded that was written from someone else’s perspective was *Days Turn Blue To Gray*, from 2003’s *Through The Ashes Of Empires*, which “was through Geneva’s eyes, and it was about her father”.

“So I’ve written nine albums now, through my eyes and through the lens that I view society,” he states. “This time, I’m not writing as Robb Flynn. I’m writing in this futuristic wasteland, through these two different character’s eyes, who are polar opposites to each other. It was such a fascinating way to write, because now I had to step into this other person’s mindset. It was really cool. I’ve never done anything like it.”

He has a point. Machine Head have never made a record like *Of Kingdom And Crown* before. From audacious, 10-minute opening metal symphony *Slaughter The Martyr* and the blistering, Bay Area brutality of *Choke On The Ashes Of Your Hate*, to the crushing chug-fest of *Kill Thy Enemies* and insanely catchy, instant anthem *No Gods, No Masters*, Machine Head’s 10th album amounts to a wholesale upgrade of their trademark sound, with bigger riffs, bigger melodies and a sense of tight-knit destructiveness (props to studio drummer Naven Koperweis, who stood in for a locked-down Matt Alston) that’s pointedly and ruthlessly contemporary. Meanwhile, despite telling a fictional tale, these songs are as emotionally potent and relatable as anything Robb has ever written, and deliberately so.

“I wanted to make it a human story. I didn’t want it to be about robots in the future!” Robb grins. “I can’t connect to that. I wanted it to be about human emotions and that’s what allowed me to connect, through these characters I’m singing about. It has to tap into something that I feel inside of me. It could tap into emotions of sadness, joy or rage, or the murderous impulses that people have. It’s a really dark record. It’s fucking *black* at times. But then again, a song like *Arrows [In Words From The Sky]* is maybe the most hopeful song we’ve ever written... even though it’s totally sad and depressing! Ha ha ha!”

Aside from recording a new album, Machine Head have spent the last few years maintaining a vital and relentless online presence. Often seeming to bypass the usual metal media channels, Robb and Jared have been performing weekly shows from Machine Head’s Oakland HQ, streaming it all live and imposing no limits on which songs they play at any given time. Known as Electric Happy Hour, the shows began when Robb started playing acoustic sets as a means to maintain a connection with fans. They proved an immediate hit with Machine Head’s diehard supporters, and have grown in popularity ever since.

“Dude, it’s crazy,” says Robb, looking genuinely bemused. “We’ve done 120 Happy Hours at this point, acoustic and electric, every Friday. We get an average of 1,000 to 1,500 people. On the big ones, the album playthroughs of *The Blackening* and *Burn My Eyes*, we’re getting four or five thousand people, and that’s just live. A ton of people who missed it live go and watch it, and that’ll be more like 60–70,000. We’ve found a way to monetise it, because they do cost money, and I’ve got a crew now. But people chip in money and that’s great. It can’t float the band but it can keep the lights on.”

In contrast with many of the costly looking livestream events that took place during the height of Covid, Machine Head’s Happy Hours are knowingly rough around the edges, as Robb and Jared play (and drink) their way through all manner of MH originals and unexpected cover versions. Four years ago, Machine Head seemed to be crumbling. In 2022, they’ve been visibly having more fun than ever before.

“I know a lot of people think I’m a fucking idiot, like ‘What are you doing, playing online? What a loser!’” laughs Robb. “But it’s *awesome*. I’ve played more over the two years of the pandemic than ever before. I’ve learned more songs than ever before, my fucking chops are ridiculous, I started taking vocal lessons and my clean vocals have improved. Plus, at this point, Jared and I know every single Machine Head song we ever put out.”

With a tour coming up, is that fact making Vogg and Matt a bit nervous?

“Oh yeah, *totally*. They’re like, ‘Dude, that’s a lot of songs!’ Ha ha ha!”

After Robb declared he was done with festival slots and package tours, the prospect of Machine Head co-headlining any kind of live event seemed remote at best. He notes that there will definitely be more An Evening With... shows in the future, but that the forthcoming Vikings And Lionhearts tour with Amon Amarth was simply too good an opportunity to miss.

“I said no, originally,” he deadpans. “I just wanted to do my own thing. But the more I thought about it, it was a pretty strong package and the Amon Amarth guys are fucking

awesome dudes. I felt like it was a great chance to take it to another level. The two of us together could go into arenas, throughout all of Europe and the UK, and that was exciting to me. Machine Head can deliver an arena show. We’ve done it before.”

With the added excitement of a run of Electric Happy Hour Live shows in Scotland, prior to the full arena jaunt, Robb is looking forward to road-testing his new line-up and notching up some new shared experiences.

“Those guys have got to know their shit,” he warns, eyes twinkling. “They’ve got to be ready! I don’t know what the future holds, but I like that framework of a loose, jammy thing, and not doing the same songs every night in a new city. I feel it’s going to take more of that kind of direction in future. I love the freeness of it. I love that you’ve got to constantly think! Touring can be a grind, so having that kind of spontaneity is a blessing.”

Robb leans back in his chair and grins broadly. After our conversation, he is due to head to the lake for some well-earned rest’n’wakeboarding with his family: a rare opportunity to switch off from the band he has led for the last 31 years. But if history teaches us anything, it is that Robb Flynn never stays switched off for long. The past is dead. Machine Head are back, rejuvenated by new blood, inspired by new ways of writing and as unique and undeniable as they ever were. Make way for the new, improved bulldozer that *still* crushes all.

“I’ll say this: I’m unbelievably proud of this record,” Robb avows. “I felt like we absolutely did everything we could to put in our best performances and our best efforts. All of us are super-proud of what we did. I’m super-proud of all my guys. I’m standing on the shoulders of giants. It makes me whole, playing music, and that’s all I want to do.” **H**

OF KINGDOM AND CROWN IS OUT ON AUGUST 26 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. THEY TOUR THE UK WITH AMON AMARTH FROM AUGUST 31

Robb can't wait to unleash the new material in arenas!

EVIL EMPIRE

Robb Flynn's track-by-track guide to new album *Of Kingdom And Crown*

SLAUGHTER THE MARTYR

"This is Ares' origin story. He's just lost the love of his life and now his life is just utter, unfettered revenge. It's the only thing on his mind. It's an epic, 10-minute opener. Let's fucking do this!"

CHOKE ON THE ASHES OF YOUR HATE

"It's fast as fuck. It's a rager. That song is just pure thrash. I just wanted to hear some pure Bay Area fucking thrash metal, just ripping your fucking face off, nonstop."

BECOME THE FIRESTORM

"When I wrote this, it was just so fucking pissed. I was so stoked on it. We're already doing it at the Happy Hours. It's a monster. People go crazy for that song."

OVERDOSE [INTERLUDE]

MY HANDS ARE EMPTY

"To me, this feels like a classic Machine Head song. This is where Eros' mother dies, so this is the beginning of his depression and his downward spiral."

UNHALLOWED

"This is where Eros is in the depths of depression. It's got some of Vogg's riffs. It's ground that we've never covered, that makes me super-happy."

ASSIMILATE [INTERLUDE]

KILL THY ENEMIES

"I just wanted to have some classic, Bay Area chug. It's *all* down-picking. You've got to dig your pick right in, to get that scrape on every single down-pick. That's some Bay Area shit right there!"

NO GODS, NO MASTERS

"I wrote the chorus hook, and oh fuck, I was *really* stoked on that. I knew it was going to be an anthem, and every motherfucker in the room – in the *arena* – is going to be singing this shit."

BLOODSHOT

"*Bloodshot* is another Vogg jam. He wrote some riffs and Jared wrote some riffs in this. That song's going to be a rager. No singing at all. Just all heavy vocals, the whole time."

ROTTEN

"It's very caveman, very old-school Machine Head. That song has the same spirit as *Burn My Eyes*. It's written from that same, simple perspective. It's a punch in the face."

TERMINUS [INTERLUDE]

ARROWS IN WORDS FROM THE SKY

"I wrote this on my acoustic guitar, walking along the beach in Turks and Caicos, in the Caribbean. I wanted to write a song that people would want to sing along with me."

PARKWAY DRIVE



BREAKING POINT

Plague. Death. Floods. The last few years have taken their toll on Parkway Drive and put them in group therapy. Is there any light in the darkness?

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: DAVE LePAGE



“You lied to us!”

As the words boom from the silhouetted figure sitting opposite, a fist comes crashing down on the rickety old table in front of us, the sound echoing around the walls of the crypt we find ourselves shivering in.

“You lied; there’s no way to talk your way out of this. Every single thing you said wasn’t going to happen, happened.”

Winston McCall is angry. We haven’t seen the Parkway Drive vocalist for four years now, and, due to the fact that he’s decided to meet us in the dark, dank underground crypt of London’s St Pancras Church, we can’t really see him right now. Nonetheless, we know he’s seething.

“The government spent years telling us that our taxes and insurance would rise if we put plans in place to try and stop something like this,” he continues. “We were told that it would never happen. We were told it was once every 50 years, then once every 100 years, then once every 500 years – and it happened twice in a matter of weeks. Now there are people whose homes have been destroyed, and the land they own is literally underwater and worthless. Who is going to buy that land when it’s at the bottom of a river? How are these people, on low incomes, meant to recover from that? We’ve been saying for years that this was going to happen, we’ve...”

Winston puffs out his cheeks and sits back in his chair for a second, presumably in an attempt to calm himself.

Back in February, a series of floods decimated eastern Australia. Homes were destroyed, food shortages were reported, 1,000 schools were closed, evacuations took place and 22 people lost their lives. It was one of the most catastrophic events in Australia’s history, with 677mm of rainfall in Brisbane breaking the highest three-day total ever recorded. As residents of Byron Bay, the most easterly point of the mainland, the members of Parkway Drive saw it all happen. It was, in Winston’s words, “Some Old Testament shit”.

It came during one of the most fraught periods in Parkway Drive’s history. On April 6, they released a statement announcing they were cancelling their US tour. It read: “The relentless nature of being in this band has given us very little time to reflect on who we are as individuals, who we want to be and the toll it is taking on ourselves and our friendships.”

All of this has sounded pretty troubling from an outside perspective. So, what’s been going on?

In front of us in the crypt, Winston is still incensed about the impact of the flooding disaster, which he believes would have been mitigated by advance warning. “I need to tell you this, because the media are not reporting what happened,” he says. “There was a flood warning, and then, suddenly, they said it wasn’t coming. For days they said there was going to be no flood. Then, half an hour before it hit, we heard, ‘It’s coming.’ What are you meant to do then?”

“They said it would be, roughly, one storey high. It was three storeys high in some cases. Those houses were destroyed, the flood went, and they used the insurance cheques to rebuild them... then a month later, the same thing happened. They might just not rebuild those towns; those communities might just be gone forever. Why would you stay when this is going to keep happening? There are people who are now having to have food airlifted to them by a helicopter because they can’t get across to land.”

A few days later, we get Parkway guitarist Jeff Ling on Zoom to ask about his version of events. “It’s sad to say, but I used to travel the world and tell people I was proud to be Australian,” he sighs. “Not anymore. Our politics is just

disgusting; our government just completely turned their back on those people.”

In the aftermath of the flood, when then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison visited the city of Lismore, protesters were prevented from talking to him and separated by a line of police. The opinion that the government abandoned people is common, but in the face of such adversity, local communities stepped up to help. “I started to embrace nihilism,” says Winston. “But those people provided me with a little bit of hope.”

Jeff tell us how his partner set up a Facebook group where those in need – the elderly, people with young children or pets – could make themselves known. It led to volunteers with boats and supplies going down to find them and taking them to safety. “I’m so proud of her,” he beams.

These days, the members of Parkway are learning to see silver linings in clouds. The last few years have been “full *Some Kind Of Monster*” for the band, according to Winston, and “pretty touch and go for a while there” in Jeff’s words. That US tour cancellation was symptomatic of big problems in Parkway’s camp. “We had to do that,” says Winston firmly. “It was either cancel that tour, or go ahead with it and inevitably cancel everything later down the line.”

So, what has been going on, then?

“Where do I even start?” replies Winston. “We all have our roles in this band, and my role is the face and the emotional core. I had been pouring so much of myself into this band for so long, and the other guys are not lyrics guys, they’re just music guys, so I don’t think they understood just how hard it was for me to get up and connect with these songs every single night. You know, [2018 album] *Reverence* was dealing with all this grief and pain, and I’m the one who had to inhabit that all the time.”

Jeff concedes that Winston may have a point. “I get it,” he tells us. “I think me and all of the other guys have only just started to realise how much of a challenge that is, because none of us think like that about lyrics. We were so focused on the sound of the music that we just never considered that.”

“It got really bad,” Winston reveals. “It got to a place where we all just started really resenting each other.”

Consequently, the band, much like Metallica in the aforementioned *Some Kind Of Monster* documentary, decided to enter therapy together. “It’s an ongoing process,” Jeff says cautiously, when we ask how the sessions have been. “But we’ve made some really incredible strides forward. Our relationships have improved immeasurably. I actually wondered if that was possible at one point.”

“I’ve actually been surprised by how much they’ve taken to it,” Winston smiles. “I think where I was on *Reverence* is where some of them were when we started. I knew I was in a pretty bad place; I knew I needed to work on myself. I think the other guys hadn’t quite realised that yet. The pandemic was hard on all of us, we lost people... I lost people to suicide...” His voice trails off for a second. “It’s hard to explain if you haven’t had personal experience of dealing with that.”

We have, we tell him. It’s horrible. The unexplained, unanswerable, unresolved feelings that run through your mind, that nagging feeling you could have done something...

“You couldn’t though,” he replies. “You can’t blame yourself, but, yeah, I get that. It changes you as a person.” It’s gone quiet in the crypt.

“If we were having this conversation in a coffee shop or a pub, I don’t think we’d be speaking like this,” says Winston softly. “That’s part of the reason I did this. I want everything, even this interview, to be part of the art of this album.” ▶

Winston McCall is in
a reflective mood



PARKWAY DRIVE

Parkway Drive are piecing themselves back together thanks to therapy



Ah yes, and that's why we're here. Parkway Drive have a new album, written and recorded before they went into therapy. It's called *Darker Still*, and it's aptly named because, although you may have heard the lead single *Glitch* with all of its nu metal bounce and typically anthemic Parkway chorus, it is far from reflective of the full album.

"Yeah, that song is at the start and the entire album is meant to represent a crash," Winston explains. "It's very much carrying on from *Reverence*, but it's more. It is saying, 'Things look like they're really bad, and, do you know what? They are. But they're just going to get worse and worse and worse.' We felt like it was the end of the world, and so we made an album that sounds like the world ending."

It follows a loose concept based on *The Dark Night Of The Soul* (see below), and the second half spirals further into the depths. The yell-along, mosh-inducing metalcore of their early days is replaced by slow, menacing, grubby laments that have more in common with Winston's beloved Nick Cave and Tom Waits than anything from the scene they grew up in.

"I'M NOT GOING TO APOLOGISE FOR CHANGING"

WINSTON McCALL

"I hear all this stuff from fans like, 'Why don't you just make *Killing With A Smile* or *Horizons* part two?'" Jeff tells us. "That's just really not going to happen. We never want to sit still, and if you were to go back and try and make those records again, you'd never capture the magic we had the first time around."

It's fair to say those fans maybe didn't see the nu metal influence coming, though...

"Really?" scoffs Winston incredulously. "The guy sitting here in the orange tracksuit bottoms? You never saw that coming? Ha ha ha! Listen, we have to keep pushing forward. I think that those experiments we touched on with [2015's] *Ire* and *Reverence* have now become the entire album, which is what I wanted, I'm not going to apologise for that."

Can it get any darker? Darker than sitting in the bowels of a pitch-black church surrounded by dead bodies and talking about suicide? Winston considers the question for a while.

"I mean..." he ponders. "It can. It's just a reflection of our lives, of the world around us. I do still have a bit of hope."

Our time in the crypt is up, but before we go, we just have to ask: you guys are OK, aren't you?

"We're getting there," comes the reply.

And with that we leave, away from the darkness and back into the light. **H**

DARKER STILL IS OUT ON SEPT 9 VIA EPITAPH

SOUL SURVIVORS

New album *Darker Still* is based on the idea of *The Dark Night Of The Soul* – here's your explainer

What exactly is *The Dark Night Of The Soul*?

The origin of the idea comes from a 16th-century poem of that name by Spanish mystic and poet St. John of the Cross, who said that it represented "dying through a true mortification... to arrive at a sweet and delicious life with God." The first verse reads: 'Upon obscure night / Fevered with love's anxiety (O hapless, happy plight!) / I went,

none seeing me / Forth from my house, where all things quiet be.'

OK, is there a more up-to-date explanation?

There is. The phrase began to take on a more literal meaning. *The Psychiatric Times* noted it was used informally to describe a "difficult and painful period in one's life, for example, after the death of a loved one, the break-up of

a marriage, or the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness."

That's bleak.

It is, but the concept is seen by some as an essential piece of evolution for us all to go through. *Kosmos Journal* says that we should see the process as "a kind of initiation, taking you from one phase of your life into another. You may have several dark nights

in the course of your life because you are always becoming more of a person and entering life more fully. At least that is the hope."

Are Parkway Drive the first artists to touch on the concept? Artists such as Depeche Mode, Van Morrison, Mark Lanegan, Ulver, Jonathan Hultén and Mayhem have referenced it. So, Parkway are in esteemed company.

LIMP BIZKIT

GOTTA HAVE FAITH

Back in 1997, Limp Bizkit were just wannabes with big dreams. Then they released *Three Dollar Bill, Y'All* and that George Michael cover, breaking down the door to mainstream stardom

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS







It was October 23, 1997 in Burlington, Vermont, and Limp Bizkit were halfway through a show that was going down like a lead balloon.

Four months earlier, their debut album, *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all*, which threw together blistering rap and juggernaut riffs, had marked them as one of metal's promising new noises. They had spent the last year on the road, playing their first UK shows – with Korn, including a stop at London's iconic Brixton Academy in June – and Warped Tour in July and August. But that buzz hadn't reached Burlington's Memorial Auditorium yet – the reception that greeted Bizkit, who were supporting Primus alongside Powerman 5000, was one of stony apathy.

What a difference a week can make. "I've never seen anything change so quickly and so dramatically," recalls Powerman 5000 vocalist Spider One who, watching from the side of the stage each night, quite literally saw Bizkit's momentum catch up with them. "People started showing up early, they knew the songs and they were singing along. I remember distinctly when they'd play *Counterfeit*, people at the front on the barricade knowing every word. By the end of the tour, they should have been headlining above Primus."

It's hard to imagine now, but before the backlash, before the album launches at the Playboy Mansion, and before the band became overexposed, obnoxious caricatures of themselves vilified by the music press, there was a time when Limp Bizkit represented an exciting new frontier in heavy music. *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all* didn't spawn globally dominating singles such as *Nookie* or *Rollin'* – in truth, it was a patchy record still feeling its way through a formula its creators would arguably nail on their follow-up, 1999's *Significant Other*. But on its release on July 1, 1997, the album introduced an unfiltered, gritty, albeit green, fresh take on the rap-rock fusion of bands such as Rage Against The Machine and Faith No More.

“WE MADE SURE IT WAS A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE”

FRED DURST

"If you listen to it now, it's probably got three or four really good songs on it," says journalist Dan Silver, who interviewed the band in 1997 for their first *Metal Hammer* feature. "The rest of it feels like a stepping stone to where they would go. Its importance is the doors that it opened, rather than the music that was on it."

It would be a few years until nu metal coalesced into the commercial force that would dominate popular culture through the late 90s and early 00s. But while the dots still needed connecting, they were already present and correct. That year, Coal Chamber released their self-titled debut, Incubus put out *S.C.I.E.N.C.E.* and Deftones dropped *Around the Fur*. Meanwhile, System Of A Down had just signed to Rick Rubin's American Recordings label and Korn had established themselves as metal's grand hopes.

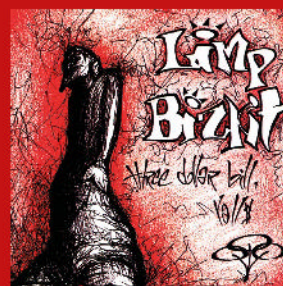
"It did feel quite exciting," remembers Dan. "All these bands with similar influences, and that knew each other, were forming a bit of a movement. It felt like something that was our own, for the younger generation coming through."

Despite being lumped together, the bands that would form the bedrock of nu metal were disparate in both sound and aesthetic. On *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all*'s release, Limp Bizkit were incessantly dismissed as Korn wannabes, but in truth, their sound was much grittier than the rest of their peers, drawing heavily from hip hop, metal and hardcore – although it shared that same boundary-blurring mentality. ►

Critics? You're going down...

HIGH NOTES

Where to start with
Three Dollar Bill, Y'All



THE HIT: FAITH

In Bizkit's hands, George Michael's 1987 pop hit was transformed into a barking, frenzied, spit-flecked pit-starter. "We took a song, ate it, swallowed it and shat out a phat Limp Bizkit version of it," Fred told *Hammer* in 1999. "We didn't just do the cover." Well, quite.

THE CLASSIC: COUNTERFEIT

Apparently about bands who tried to copy them, the lead-off single had a satisfyingly chunky low-end and an explosive ending. Oh, and a weird video of a boy turning into a fly. It might not have been an instant hit, but it soon became a favourite, and is still on their setlist today.

THE WILD CARD: NOBODY LOVES ME

'Shut up!' Between the vicious, bounce-along intro, the moody atmospheric and scratching, Wes Borland's weird fretwork and grinding chorus riff, and Fred's flip between whining vocals and a Tool-influenced bridge, *Nobody Loves Me* was a Frankenstein's monster of styles that somehow still made sense.

LIMP BIZKIT

Limp Bizkit: *not* a bunch of knuckleheads, despite appearances



"Me and Jonathan [Davis, Korn frontman] are the same age, we grew up listening to the same shit, everything's the same and it kinda rubbed off on our music a bit," Fred told us in '97. "The intense build-up vibe is there, 'cos we're part of this skool, but we're not playing the same fucking notes, the same patterns, sustaining the same tunes... when they hear me rap, how could they say that?"

"They were an organic blend," says Dan Silver today. "Fred has that hip hop background and DJ Lethal [ex-House Of Pain] clearly has that hip hop background, but Wes [Borland] is a classical metal guitarist, while [drummer] John Otto can flip between the two quite easily."

It was no coincidence that the birth of nu metal coincided with the launch of the first MP3 player, spawning a shuffle mentality between bands, who had begun pulling influence from all corners of the sonic spectrum, and fans alike. For Fred, who'd grown up on a mixture of 80s hip hop, glam metal and hardcore, it was all part of his starting vision.

"A lot of bands have tried to mix up stuff," Fred Durst told MTV in 1997. "But no one's done it like us yet. We made sure it was a rollercoaster ride on that record."

When Limp Bizkit formed in 1994, they quickly built a solid following in their hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, playing rowdy shows at a local haunt called Milk Bar. Back then, Fred was a hustler, rallying A&R executives and jamming flyers and demo tapes into the hands of anyone he could get to pay attention.

"He was always business savvy," remembers Warped Tour founder Kevin Lyman, who runs the podcast My Warped Life, and had booked the band to play on the 1997 jaunt. "That knucklehead thing gets perpetuated, and they fed that in some ways. But in the background, there was a lot of business going on in their minds."

During Warped Tour, Kevin remembers that Fred would sign up every day to meet with the press. "He wasn't afraid to work. It might be some kid from the Poughkeepsie school newspaper, and he would give them an interview like he was talking to *Rolling Stone*."

It all paid off in 1996, when Fred handed Korn's bassist, Fieldy, a copy of Bizkit's demo at a Jacksonville gig. It was Fieldy who would hook the band up with Ross Robinson, who produced *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all* at Indigo Ranch recording studio in Malibu, in early 1997. The long sessions, which aimed to capture the energy of the live show, were mired in Fred's romantic melodrama.

"He had a lot of heaviness in his mind dealing with girlfriends, and he was serious," Ross recalls. "So, he was kind of difficult to function around 'cos he was so heavy, and then extremely the greatest dude ever... it was kind of a bi-polar thing happening."

There are many things to celebrate about *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all*'s futuristic vision, but Fred's lyrical prowess is not one of them. The rapper's relationship drama would provide the lyrical inspiration for *Sour* and *Stuck* ("Stuck on yourself, you



"IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FUNCTION AROUND FRED"

ROSS ROBINSON

where'), and listening to those tracks now is an uncomfortable experience that blunts the album's innovative approach.

"At the time, not many people in the scene would have really batted an eyelid at those lyrics, but obviously 25 years later they don't look great," says Dan Silver. "Lots of people beat Limp Bizkit with lots of sticks, but their misogyny wasn't really anything that came up at the time."

It's true that Bizkit's unsavoury lyrics did little to stem their rise. By

October 1998, slots on high-profile tours such as Ozfest and Korn's Family Values tour had only raised their profile. But it was their cover of George Michael's *Faith* that would break them on a truly global scale.

"I came in [to the studio] one day and the band were like, 'What the hell are you talking about? We're going to do *Faith*?'" Fred told MTV in 2000. "I was like, 'Trust me, man. We'll do the beginning kind of cheesy like he did, then we'll just... blow it up.'"

The video for the single was put on almost constant rotation by MTV. At a time when their endorsement could change your career overnight, Bizkit found themselves catapulted into the mainstream consciousness alongside megawatt stars such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera.

"I don't think anybody expects to become that famous," says Spider One. "You start your silly little band and you're lucky to get out of the garage. Fred was just a normal dude and I think that's ultimately what connected the fastest for them."

Although Korn are recognised as spearheading nu metal, *Faith* would turn out to be the genre's first true global moment. As the band's profile grew, egos ran wild and unchecked, only emphasising the personality gulf between Fred's cartoonish persona and the introspective, freakishly theatrical Wes Borland.

"It was always such a strange pairing," says Spider One. "I don't want to speak for [Wes], but I think that's why he planted that flag, like, 'I'm going to be the weird guy in this band.' I think it was probably very important to him to draw a line, at least in an aesthetic way."

Limp Bizkit's subsequent albums, 1999's *Significant Other*, and 2000's unstoppable *Chocolate Starfish And The Hot Dog Flavored Water*, which would sell an incredible one million copies in its first week, and would eclipse *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all* in terms of commercial power. But the band's debut would still go double platinum in July 2001, and can be credited as a turning point that steered metal towards mainstream consciousness.

"They were actually groundbreaking," says Kevin Lyman, who reckons the band's contribution to metal is often unfairly discounted. "Some of that knuckleheaded-ness overshadowed what they were doing."

"Would Linkin Park have been as big as they were if Limp Bizkit hadn't pushed this music towards the mainstream?" asks Dan Silver. In the end, he believes *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all* was the stepping stone that connected metal to mass acceptance, probably for the last time. "The doors it opened and the barriers it broke down are its greatest legacy." ■

Inspired by the darkness of their childhoods in the American South and the work of Stephen King, Oceans Of Slumber have reinvented themselves. Welcome to...

The New Southern Gothic

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY • PICTURES: THE HEAVY GLOW/JAMIE LaCOMBE





T

he dark side of America's Deep South has long been a source of inspiration for storytellers, from writers such as Flannery O'Connor to TV shows like *True Detective*. Exploring race, religious fanaticism, magic, the supernatural and the

grotesque, 'Southern Gothic' stories reject the old romantic South and expose its underbelly, often with horrifying results. Now, Texan band Oceans Of Slumber are presenting their take on Southern Gothic with their fifth album, *Starlight And Ash*.

"There's a charm and a draw to this place," Oceans Of Slumber drummer Dobber Beverly says of the South. "And no matter how bad it gets here – and it can get bad – people still want to be here. There's some kind of magic, especially down here on the coast [he's in Houston, Texas]."

"There's such a mix of music that you're exposed to down here pretty early on," adds Oceans vocalist Cammie Beverly. "There's a ton of Southern Baptist churches, Southern gospel, you have blues, jazz, country, folk – there's a bit of everything. And then you add on the heat, you add on the culture, and it kind of infuses in a magical way."

Dobber started Oceans Of Slumber back in 2011, and Cammie joined in 2014. Since then the pair have been leading the band. Cammie's powerful voice and charismatic presence was the missing piece for Oceans, taking their intoxicating mix of heavy prog, goth and doom to a whole new level. "Cammie is very powerfully emotive to the point where, to me, she's untouchable," Dobber says.

As well as being bandmates, Cammie and Dobber are a couple, and they got married last December. "I loved and respected Cammie as the musical entity that she is far before there was intimate love between us," Dobber confides in his Texan drawl. "To me, it's amazing to be in a band with someone who I have that much respect for as an artist, regardless of the fact we're married." When asked what it's like making music with your partner, Cammie says, "Making a song together is like another love language to me."

Both Cammie and Dobber were raised in the American South. Their experiences shaped the adults they would become, and the music they would make. For Cammie, religion was an overpowering presence in her childhood. Her father was a member of an organisation called the Institute Of Divine Metaphysical Research (IDMR), and her family attended services until she was around nine years old.

"It was a really eye-opening look into how intense religion can be," Cammie says. "I'm confident to say that I feel like it was a cult. Not in the sense that maybe people think, like you're living in the middle of nowhere in a commune. It was a very central, urbanised church, but it had pretty radical outlooks. The founder was believed to have direct communication with God, telepathy and healing powers, and there was a ton of Hell, hellfire and punishment, with the Devil always whispering in your ear."

It wasn't all bad, though...

"The music [in the IDMR] was really popping for its time!" Cammie laughs. "There were keyboards, tambourine, guitars, and such passionate, strong singing."

When Cammie was around nine, her mother became a Jehovah's Witness, and this split the family home life in two. Cammie explains that while Jehovah's Witnesses were "gentler and kinder" than the IDMR, they were also isolated from the outside

world. "They don't associate with anyone who's not a Witness, everybody stays to themselves, and you feel like that's all they talk about," she says.

"My parents would argue a lot about religion," Cammie continues, "which is such a tiresome debate because it can just go in circles. It was stressful; there was a lot of headbutting."

At 15, Cammie and her older brother were given the choice of whether they wanted to continue going to either church. For her, the answer was obvious. "I turned my back, stomped it out and ran away with a fever!" Cammie laughs.

"It's still ongoing with me and my mom," she adds. Her father has since passed away. "I've come to a place where I accept her faith, and I try to make her understand it's just not for me."

"Growing up in a religious household, things can be so narrow-minded and it narrows your outlook. You get this sense that everybody else is the enemy and everybody else is so different, but then you get away from it and see that it's not the case. The world has a lot more hope and love and compassion to give than I feel like any one religion makes you feel."

She adds that, in the South, you don't have to look far to find "some religious zealot preaching their hot take on the Bible".

"You've got a lot of space, a lot of ignorance, and a lot of tradition [in the South], and they just all intersect," she says. "Driving around here, it's billboard after billboard of 'Be Saved' and 'Jesus Heals'."

Dobber, meanwhile, grew up in a small city called Shepherd, Texas, in what he describes as "pretty much a single parent" situation. His mum left when he was nine or 10, and his father, an engineer, worked out of town a lot. Dobber had siblings but they were older

and lived out of state, and he describes himself as a "latchkey kid" – meaning he essentially raised himself from a very young age.

"I was born in '78, and by the time the late 80s kicked in, that was an era where things had shifted so much

socially – folks were becoming single parents, there were more dual working households, and there was more responsibility laid on the kids," Dobber explains. He's quick to add that his father is a "brilliant man", and that they have a strong relationship to this day – he and Cammie got married on his father's land.

"I realised that the confines of an area like that would either bury me, or ruin my life," Dobber says. "I was like, I gotta get out, 'cos I want to do something else for myself."

One particular night from childhood continues to stick out in his mind. "One night when I was about 10 or 11, my dad didn't come home," Dobber remembers. "He had stayed out all night at a company party or something. This was all before cellphones, so I was freaking out. The road in front of my house was called Red Road, and I remember running down that road and the streetlights, just trying to find somebody to give me answers."

This memory inspired the song *Red Forest Roads* on Oceans' new album, *Starlight And Ash*. It's a haunting, darkly atmospheric track, punctuated by Cammie's soulful cries. The whole album was in part inspired by childhood memories like these – not just Dobber and Cammie's, but the entire band's.

"Everyone has that formative experience or that tragic experience that they remember from childhood, and we

"PEOPLE BELIEVED HE WAS TELEPATHIC"

CAMMIE BEVERLY

Cammie Beverly: 'That's me in
the cornfield / That's me in the
sunlight, losing my religion...'



wanted to turn them into songs,” Cammie explains, adding that it was her experiences with religion in particular that inspired the album.

“But we didn’t want to make it so personal. So it’s not like, this is Cammie’s song, Dobber’s song, Semir’s [Ozerkan, bassist] song.”

Instead, all their experiences and memories seep through the album, making it more universal. “It jumps in time, in place and perspective,” Cammie explains. “It can be individual, or a general idea – and they all play into these feelings or experiences we had growing up.”

Less heavy than some of their past albums, *Starlight And Ash* is richly cinematic, infused with Southern atmosphere, and has a darkness that’s as intense as the locality that inspired it. It’s set in a fictional, coastal Southern town that revolves around a lighthouse. As Cammie explains, the people of the town treat the lighthouse as if it were a deity: “They feel like the lighthouse is what makes or breaks people’s return, so it becomes this thing that they worship.”

“I REALISED STAYING WOULD RUIN MY LIFE”

DOBBER BEVERLY

The idea of the town was partly influenced by Stephen King’s *Castle Rock*: a fictional town in the legendary novelist’s home state of Maine that features in a number of his stories.

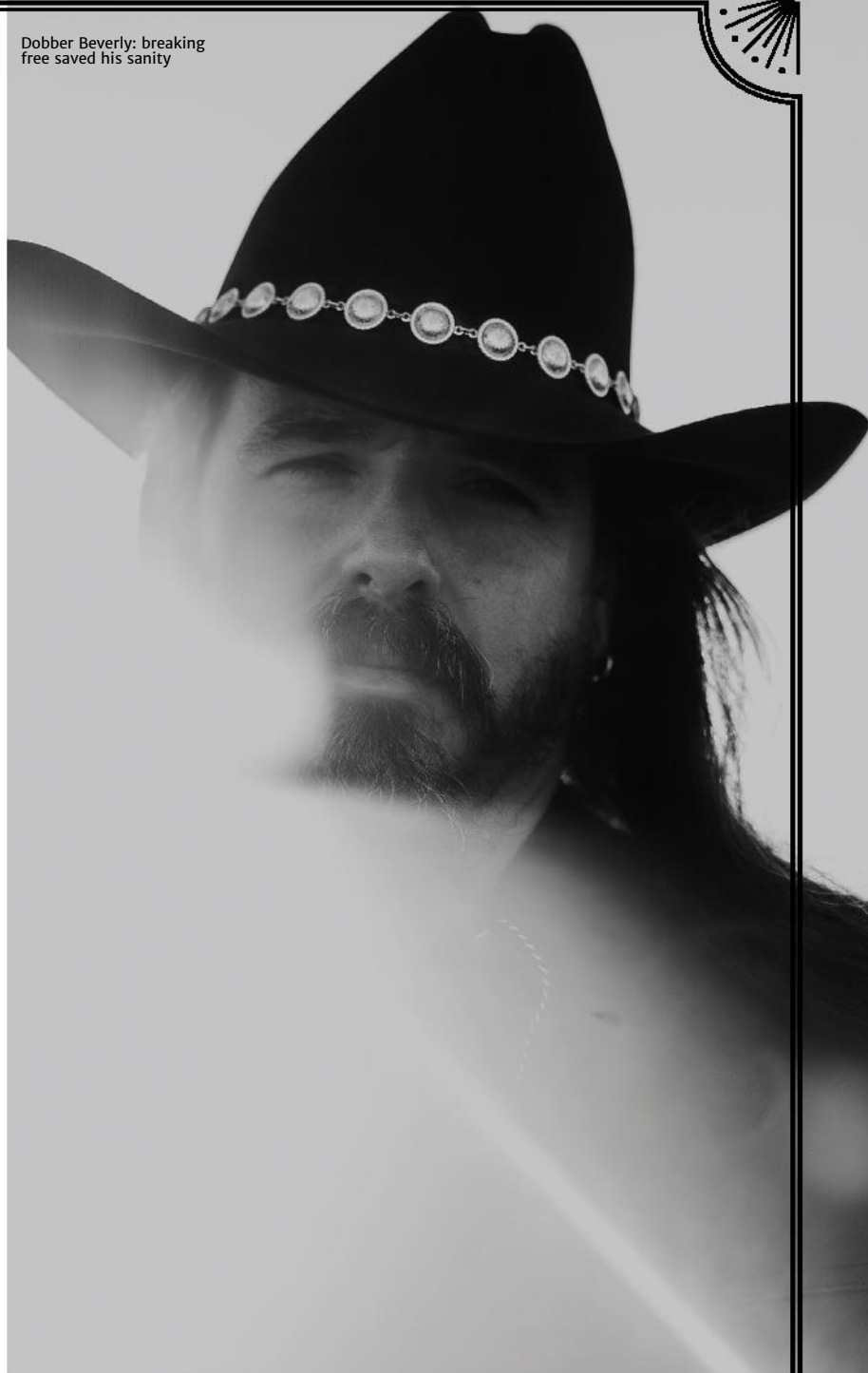
“Here’s this prolific writer, who uses the same town to make all his stories come to life,” Cammie explains, “and that’s kind of what we wanted to do. It’s so much more massive than one book, and I think that’s what I liked about it. It’s this town that holds all these stories.”

“Folks really get the run of the gamut down in the South,” Dobber says. “If you were to ask the vast majority of people who live down here what kind of atrocity or trauma or terrible things happened to them, it’s a pretty good laundry list. I realised that things I went through in my story aren’t so unique. Regardless of faith or outlook, at the end of the day we’re still human, and we still all act exactly the same. We suffer the same, feel the same, hate the same, love the same.”

“This is what the new Southern Gothic is,” he concludes. “It is suffering and love, copious amounts of both.”

STARLIGHT AND ASH IS OUT NOW VIA CENTURY MEDIA

Dobber Beverly: breaking free saved his sanity



“He was imprisoned for life”

Dobber talks us through the Southern Gothic influences behind new album *Starlight And Ash*

**Racehoss: Big Emma’s Boy
Albert Race Sample (1984)**

“This is an absolutely incredible book. It’s a true story about a man who was imprisoned for life, and his struggles. His mother was a prostitute, she ran a brothel and a gambling house. He was called Racehoss, because they were cutting cotton [in jail], and he was the fastest. It’s a very detailed account of being in a Texas prison. Throughout all this, he kept a really honest and happy outlook. And he got out and lived a good life afterwards.”

**The Gospel Singer
Harry Crews (1968)**

“I used to go to this record store called Sound Exchange in Houston and ask for things outside the norm. Like, I wanna hear something heavy that isn’t metal. It led me to the likes of Swans, Throbbing Gristle, and then I asked about literature and we landed on Harry Crews. Harry Crews was an absolute barbarian of a writer. He was an incredible writer, very visceral. *The Gospel Singer* is a brutal kind of dark comedy about salvation, about a small town, local boy from Georgia who gets famous.”

**Searching For The Wrong-Eyed Jesus
BBC documentary (2004)**

“At the time, everybody in England was infatuated with the South – it seemed so backwoods, and so romantic, and they sent these guys over to do this documentary. None of these people that were making the music [in this documentary] were wealthy people; it was all this very hard, honest music-making. They were defining their suffering, and detailing it through the songs they were making.”

DISSECTION – THE SOMBERLAIN.

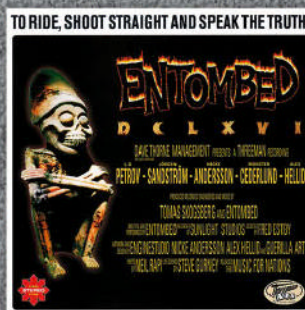
RECORDED AT UNISOUND STUDIOS IN 1993,
NOW RE-MASTERED BY **DAN SWANÖ**.



VINTERLAND
WELCOME MY LAST CHAPTER



STRÖM
STRÖM



ENTOMBED – DCLXVI
TO RIDE, SHOOT STRAIGHT
AND SPEAK THE TRUTH



ENTOMBED
MORNING STAR



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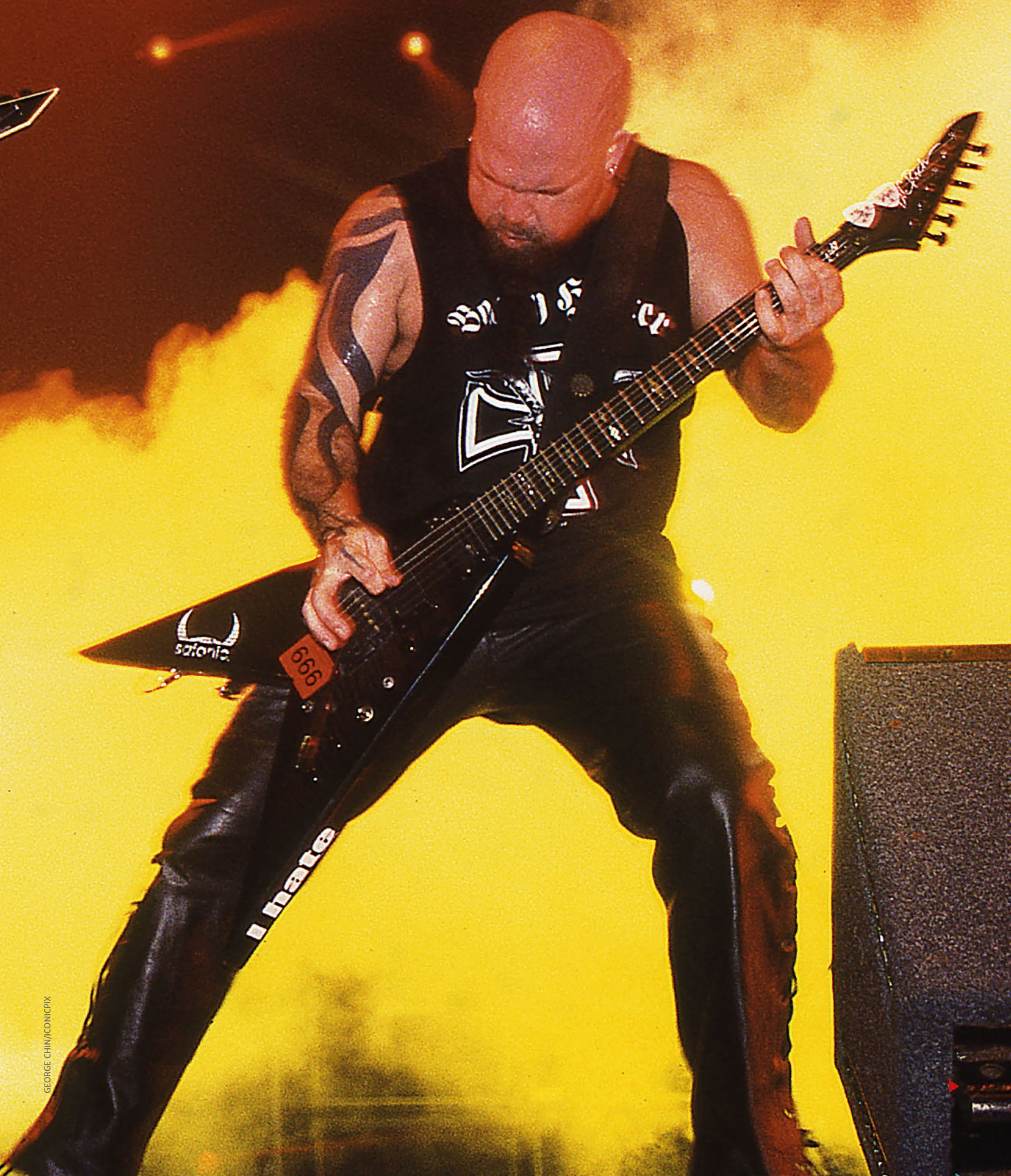


TATTOO THE PLANET

Demolition & Link

Headed up by Slayer and Pantera, Tattoo The Planet should have been the most exciting UK tour in years. Then 9/11 happened, and it all went to shit

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL





could see it from my apartment,” says Biohazard’s Billy Graziadei. “It was life-changing. The kind of event you’d never imagine was even possible.”

The mid-90s to the early 00s was a fallow period for UK metal festivals.

It was the aftermath of Monsters Of Rock at Donington Park, and before the same site was reclaimed by metalheads for Download. There was the odd Ozzfest, a few metal bands sprinkled across the stages of Reading and Leeds... but that was about it, until 2001, when a new contender entered the arena: Tattoo The Planet. It promised a day-long experience packed to the brim with the best metal bands of the time.

Only, it didn’t go to plan. Instead, 9/11, the horrifying attack Billy witnessed from his window, threw the whole thing into chaos. Headliners cancelled, bands were spooked, dates were moved, and chairs were thrown through tour bus windows. This is the story of Tattoo The Planet – the greatest metal festival the UK never saw.

The idea for Tattoo The Planet was imported from the States. In the year 2000, US promoter Scott Alderman released a statement announcing a brand-new, 30-date US touring festival named Tattoo The Earth, set to begin in July. ‘Nothing represents youth culture like music and body art,’ it read. The headliners would be confirmed as Slipknot and Slayer, alongside the likes of Coal Chamber, Soulfly and Sevendust, plus a group of renowned tattooists.

While the initial run was somewhat chaotic, with numerous bands jumping ship to Ozzfest, it attracted attention from the other side of the Atlantic. UK promoter Mags Revell, who ended up helping to shape Download a few years down the line, decided to make the trip to see it for himself, and thought it had the potential to work in Britain.

“I went along and I liked it,” he tells us. “I had a chat about bringing it over to the UK, and, I don’t really want to get into this, but they were a bit funny about the name. So, we thought ‘Earth, Planet, World... whatever, it’ll be the bands that make it work’. We decided on Tattoo The Planet, and I went down the road to Camden and took a picture of a tattoo gun and mocked it up on a globe and away we went... we didn’t even have any tattoo artists at that point!”

And so, it was confirmed. Tattoo The Planet would have a European run in 2001, starting in Dublin on September 13. The bill was strong: Cradle Of Filth, Static-X, Biohazard, Vision Of Disorder and Raging Speedhorn would join a closing one-two punch of Slayer and, most excitingly and surprisingly of all, Pantera.

“I had done Pantera’s last UK tour,” says Mags. “I thought you’d never see them over here again, because it had been so tense. So, when we got them confirmed, with Slayer as well... what a bill!”

Slayer’s Kerry King remembers his excitement for the shows. “That was like our rebirth as a band after being kind of aimless in the 90s,” he says. “*God Hates Us All* was about

to come out, which reinvigorated us and was really our blueprint for everything we did in our career after that. So we were desperate to get out and play it to people.”



Then, everything changed. On September 11, 2001, New York City’s World Trade Center suffered the most high-profile terrorist attack in US history. “I was flying out that day,” Kerry tells us. “I woke up that morning and a buddy of mine said, ‘I don’t think you’re going anywhere today.’ Then we saw it. Crazy time. If anything was ever going to make me patriotic then it was that.”

“I remember exactly where I was,” says Tim Williams, vocalist of New York’s own Vision Of

Disorder. “On either the 9th or the 10th of September we flew out to Dublin, because we wanted to get there early. We wanted to go party it up. We were on our bus picking up some drums from the rental place, and we were all amped up for this tour! Suddenly, Brendon [Cohen, drums] comes running into the bus and shouts something about planes striking the freaking towers.”

According to Tim, this is where panic set in for the band, knowing that then-guitarist Matt Baumbach’s brother was working in one of the towers. “We saw Matt walking down the street toward us looking like he’d just got off the phone,” Tim continues. “He had a really confused look on his face. We went into the rental place and found a TV, and I don’t think the second plane had even hit yet. Nothing was sinking in yet.”

Luckily, Matt’s brother made it out alive. “He’s got some crazy story about getting out,” Tim nods. “He was on the news, he saved a lot of people’s lives.”

Thousands of others wouldn’t make it out. While the events were playing out in the States and being broadcast across the world to widespread shock and sadness, life in the UK was continuing as normal. “That evening we had Alien Ant Farm playing at the [now-defunct London venue] LA2,” says Mags Revell. “They did the show and I thought, ‘OK, it’s a tragedy, but everything is going to carry on, I guess.’”

Little did he know...

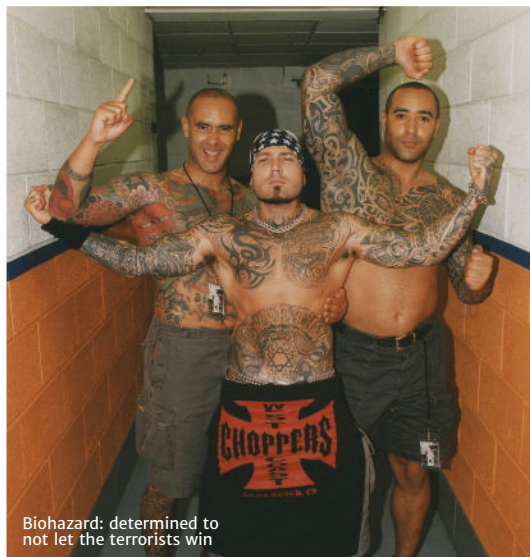
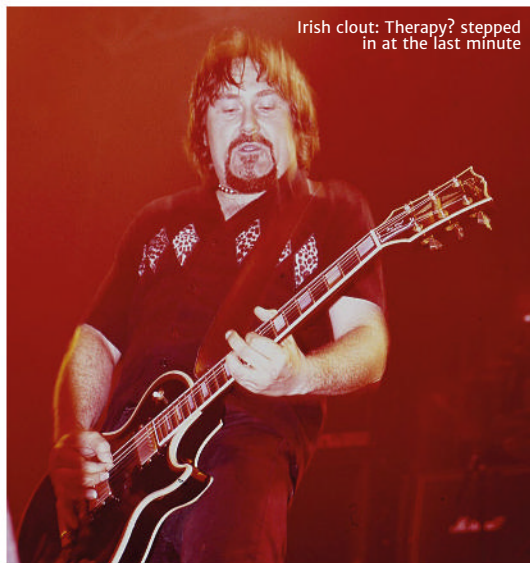
“Pantera were already out there [in the UK],” says Kerry. “They had flown out before the tour. But they decided to come back. It was kind of the end for them as a band, so maybe it was a relief in some way, maybe deep down they didn’t want to do it. But that wasn’t an option for us.”

“We were told that the first night in Ireland was going to be going ahead,” Tim Williams tells us. “But because all the flights had been cancelled, only us and Pantera were there. So, it was just going to be us and Pantera. What a dream! We were sat in this arena on the day of the show, looking at the stage that was set up with Pantera’s gear, and thinking we were about to do this huge thing... then, suddenly,

people start coming on and taking their backline down! What the hell was going on?!”

“The cowboys from Hell,” sighs Mags. “The hardest band in the world... they bottled it.”

Certain members of the tour’s line-up were less than shocked by the decision. “We were tight with the Pantera



“THE COWBOYS FROM HELL BOTTLED IT”

MAGS REVELL, PROMOTER

Cradle Of Filth: the Suffolk crew let off plenty of steam on the tour

guys, we knew how they were,” says Billy. “They weren’t too keen on touring outside of the States, they used to bring their own ketchup and Coors beers. They liked what they liked.”

Static-X and Sepultura also withdrew. As they were there, Vision Of Disorder decided they might as well see it through, but even that proved problematic.

“The show was cancelled and then they told us to go somewhere else and the show would be on,” Tim laughs. “Of course we got there and found out that the show had been cancelled. We were following this damn thing around Europe for about a week. In the end, we just had to give up and go home.”

Not for lack of trying, Vision Of Disorder never played any of the dates. Biohazard, another New York band, also wanted to honour their commitment. “We didn’t really sit down and question whether we wouldn’t do the tour,” Billy says. “I had personal thoughts about how not doing the tour, or changing the way we were living, was giving the terrorists another win. There was never a question that we wouldn’t do it.”

The pushback meant that the tour, due to start on September 13 in Dublin, actually started on September 22 in Stuttgart, Germany. “Once it got going, it was a great tour,” remembers Cradle Of Filth frontman Dani Filth. “Yes, a lot of the American bands pulling out might have been a problem, but they were replaced really well, especially in Europe. We had Destruction come join the bill in Germany. It was great!”

In the UK, the tour was rescheduled to start on October 11, propped up by UK artists Napalm Death, Therapy?, Skindred and upcoming Brit metal band Defenestration. “We had just got a new booking agent,” says Defenestration vocalist Jen Tasker. “I remember one day we got the call saying we were going to be doing Wembley Arena. We were just kids, the stage was bigger than most venues we’d played. It was surreal, obviously we were benefiting from this tragedy... but we couldn’t not be excited by the prospect of that.”

As Jen, Dani Filth and Billy will tell us, there was a unique atmosphere backstage at the shows, although all three have radically different memories. Jen remembers being starstruck at seeing members of Slayer walk past, having been “the only band ever to turn up to play Wembley in a Transit van”, whereas Dani mostly recalls having a typically debauched time. “We were just a load of young metalheads letting off steam,” he chuckles. “We had a good time with the Biohazard guys. I think Billy threw a chair through the back of our tour bus window... ask him.”

“Yeah, I think I did do that,” Billy says gingerly. “I was young, my wife was pregnant and we were worried about what was going on at home. So, I did drink a lot and my fuse was pretty short back then; it got me in a lot of trouble. I don’t remember why I did that, but it sounds like me! But you have to remember, there was so much uncertainty, everyone wanted to let off steam because we were so on edge.”

It might not have been the bill these fans were expecting, but it was still a great tour



“WE DIDN’T WANT TO GIVE THE TERRORISTS ANOTHER WIN”

BILLY GRAZIADEI

A reported £65,000 was lost on ticket returns, though Mags can’t remember the figure today. But despite the chaos backstage, on the bill and around the world, the shows were often cathartic for those who did play and attend. “There might have been a few returns from people,” Dani scoffs, “but I didn’t see any. All the shows felt pretty full to me, and it was still a great bill.”

“I remember being onstage and feeling the solidarity,” smiles Billy. “I remember someone threw the American flag onstage and we draped it between us and the feeling in the crowd was such an incredible thing. That was a big vibe for us.”

“We didn’t feel any pressure to be Pantera, no,” says Jen. “When we went on, the doors had only just opened, and it was still the biggest crowd we had ever played to. And Slayer were amazing, and we felt really honoured to be there.”

“We needed to play, and our fans needed to see us,” Kerry King tells us.

It might not have gone to plan, but Tattoo The Planet was a fine example of metal’s perseverance in the face of tragedy, and showed there was an audience for large-scale metal shows, laying the foundations for something even bigger.

“I’m proud we went ahead with it,” smiles Mags. “It was one of the best metal line-ups that there ever was, and, yeah, it didn’t pan out the way we wanted it to, but it showed there was an appetite for this music. Thousands of metalheads turning up to Wembley to see Slayer! And a few years later, we had Download. It gave us all confidence to do that and the hunger to put it right – look where we are now.”

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HEILUNG



MUSICIAN TATTOOIST SHAMAN

How do you grow up an evangelical Christian, but end up fronting a band like Heilung? According to Kai Uwe Faust, the answer involves Viking markets, mummified warriors and... a shaman?

“Traditional black metal fans always hate me for saying this, but not all Christians suck,” jokes Kai Uwe Faust, the shamanic vocalist of Heilung. “The core of it all is loving your neighbour.”

Kai is an animalistic, mysterious creature covered in fur and bones, whose grunts and chants bring Heilung’s pagan folk metal to life. Seeing him go wild onstage in a trance-like state is impressive – and slightly intimidating. Talking to him is a different experience, though; he’s all smiles and jokes while talking about being a tattoo artist, lyricist and musician, but also remembering a time when his belief system and worldviews were the exact opposite of the free-spirited life he’s leading now.

He grew up in a conservative, Bible-abiding evangelical family in rural Western Germany. Early on, he learned the importance of rituals such as prayers and church visits, but also strict rules such as not watching TV.

“When I was a kid, I used to spend endless amounts of time in the huge, ancient forests of my home,” he recalls during a video chat from his home in Copenhagen, and immediately drifts into one of his big passions – history. “There are stone circles and caves there that date back to the Stone Age. The area I grew up in was one of the last to convert to Christianity in Germany back in the 8th and 9th century, and it’s close to the so-called ‘Limes’, which was a long cultural border between the Magna Germania and the Roman Empire. I learned about this history of my ancestors and my home at a very young age.”

Kai remembers being a curious child, full of questions and with a thirst for knowledge – a disposition that slowly removed him from the teachings of the Bible and the church, but not from his family. “Of course, there are those people that turn their backs on their own children, but that was never the case in my family. They always tried to give me answers and be open. There were a lot of discussions, but at the end of the day, this is my blood. They love me, even though I’m different. And that’s what it is about; dear uncle Jesus also hung out more with whores and former soldiers than decent people,” he laughs.

Even though Kai doesn’t agree with the evangelical teachings anymore, his upbringing was formative. His first memories of music are related to church, where he learned basic musical knowledge, especially regarding choral singing. And since there was no TV in his home, he read a lot of books that ignited a passion that remains today.

“There was one book I studied before I even knew what letters were and that I still own,” he says. “It’s about the last unsolved mysteries of our world, including the Scythian mummies. Those people were tattooed, consumed cannabis and were brave warriors. I was fascinated by that and the art of the Iron Age for as long as I can remember, and started drawing such things myself very early.”

This interest in ancient history and its art would eventually lead Kai to becoming one of the top artists in the field of traditional Nordic tattooing, but his path wasn’t always clear. After finishing school, he started working in construction, which was considered a safe industry after German reunification, when new building projects were popping up left, right and centre. At this point, he wasn’t just distant from the shamanic scene – he thought it was outright nuts.

“I used to have a girlfriend that was totally into shamanism, healing stones and runes. Back then, I was all about black metal, Satan and darkness, and thought that these guys with their drums and incense sticks were totally crazy,” he recalls with amusement. “But I had an illness that no medical practitioner could help me with, so I thought I might as well give shamanism a try.”

Heilung (left to right):
Christopher Juul, Maria
Franz, Kai Uwe Faust



“I went to one of their sessions and was provided with a recipe for a 21-day cure. I could see my body healing during this time. It didn’t make sense, I couldn’t explain it, but it happened right before my eyes. I was shocked that these humming, drumming weirdos were capable of such a thing. It drastically changed my worldview and sparked an interest that I have to this day.”

The incident ushered in a shift. In his early 20s, Kai quit his construction job, got a higher education and started tattooing professionally. He was taken under the wing of German tattoo artist and book illustrator Astrid Köpfler, who not only taught him a lot artistically, but managed to get him a guest spot at Kunsten på Kroppen, the world’s oldest Nordic tattoo studio, in Copenhagen. That guest spot turned into full-time employment and, in 2015, he became the owner.

“I used to dream of getting tattooed in the studio I now own,” he says, eyes sparkling. “When I got the offer to move to Denmark and work there, I just couldn’t believe it. It’s like being some random guitarist and getting asked to join Slayer. I immediately packed my bags and was on my way.”



“I COULD SEE MY BODY HEALING BEFORE MY EYES”

Living in Northern Europe, and being able to visit the historic sites he'd only ever read about, deepened Kai's interest in Nordic history and mythology. He had started writing when he got into shamanism, to document the fleeting images and impressions he experienced in the state of trance. From these factual accounts, he quickly moved on to poems and short stories. The track *Keltentrauer*, about a clash between the Celts and the Romans, on new Heilung album *Drif*, is one of his earliest poems and is about 20 years old.

In the beginning, Kai only wrote in German, and after improving his language skills through travelling, he added English. But it was only when he moved to Denmark and had close contact with the Scandinavian languages that he started working intensely with the Gothic, Old Norse and Old High German source material we can hear in many of

Heilung's songs. “The country itself is a great teacher and source of strength and wisdom,” he says.

Although Kai was aware of the power of music and singing thanks to his shamanic experiences, he never planned on performing in public. When he joined the scene in the 90s, it was very small and secretive, as spiritual practices were a lot less mainstream than they are today, and many people in Germany were wary of people trying to revive Germanic traditions and spiritualism. It wasn't until 2014, when he recorded some poems with producer and now-bandmate Christopher Juul, that the seed for Heilung was planted.

“Christopher is an absolute musical genius and quickly was quite bored with just recording me talking, so we started adding background noises, then he asked me if I could sing a bit. When I did, his eyes started to sparkle and he basically locked me in the recording room until I'd let everything out that was somehow usable,” he remembers with a giggle.

Christopher's partner, Maria Franz, felt so inspired that she spontaneously joined as a singer as well – and Heilung was born. Kai first met the couple in the early 2000s, as all of them were active in Viking reenactment markets across Scandinavia. “There was a lot of music and alcohol involved,” he says about his faint, earliest memories of them. ►

Just as Heilung are not a typical band – they call their style of music ‘amplified history’, referring to the integration of the ancient and the modern – Kai Uwe Faust is not a regular vocalist or musician. In accordance with shamanic practice, he sees himself as a medium or a vessel for other people, to help them find fulfilment. “When I go onstage, I empty myself and invite helping forces to work through me,” he explains. “That means that Kai as a person, as an ego, has to step back and make room, which is why there are shows that I can barely remember. Physically, I only work through muscle memory then.”

Five years after their first gig, and with their third studio album about to come out, Heilung are still seeing their ambition manifest. Their name is the German word for ‘healing’, and Kai says many fans have reported

“IT WAS LIKE BEING ASKED TO JOIN SLAYER”

improvements to their mental and physical health after listening to a Heilung album or attending a show.

“We know what happens when you confront people with certain rhythms. There’s research proving that it alters your brain waves – and we use that knowledge,” he explains. “We came to change and expand people’s consciousness, to help them find their happiness, their strength and wholeness – and as long as we’re called Heilung, that will be our mission. The fact that it’s become so big just shows that there are a lot of people out there right now that need this reconnection to themselves and their history.”

As for his own family, things look a little different: Kai’s sister has seen Heilung perform but his parents haven’t. “That’s not going to happen because it’s just too far removed and collides with their own worldview. And that’s OK,” he shrugs. “I think they’re just happy that their highly unhappy, aggressive child turned into a person that manages to get by.” ■

DRIF IS OUT ON AUGUST 19 VIA SEASON OF MIST. HEILUNG TOUR THE UK IN JANUARY 2023



Kai invites forces to work through him

CREATING A BUZZ

As well as singing in Heilung, Kai is a renowned tattooist at Copenhagen studio Kunsten på Kroppen. Here are some of his designs

“All three of these tattoos have one thing in common: they belong to people that are close to me and we always had a great time during our sessions. On top of that, all three of them are advanced collectors of tattoo art and very conscious about the symbols and designs they pick. Creating these pieces with them was a very joyous and fulfilling task.”



“This tattoo symbolises the union of two different people and cultures. Around the area of the heart, traditional Nordic stylistics meet Slavic designs. Done on occasion of his wedding, by now this symbolic meaning is also reflected in the offspring that sprung from this union.”



“This woman is lying on a dolmen grave [a Neolithic stone formation] that is approximately 5,000 years old. The tattoo motif on her leg is taken from the Celtic Iron Age and done in the so-called La Tène style [predominant in the 5th to the 1st centuries BC].”



“There are descriptions of the tree of life in medieval scriptures. The concept can be found in many animistic cultures, obviously from our European ancestors, but there also seem to be similar concepts in the cultures of the aboriginal people.”



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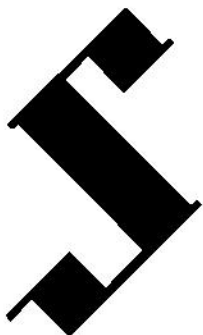
BLIND GUARDIAN

“This is a New Beginning”

Following the death of Hansi's mother and a seven-year gap since their last record proper, Blind Guardian have ditched the orchestras, dialled down the prog, and made their heaviest album in years

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PORTRAITS: DIRK BEHLAU





itting on a boat on the river Rhine near Cologne in his native Germany, Hansi Kürsch looks at peace with the world as he basks in the glorious sunshine. His band, Blind Guardian, have just treated a small contingent of journalists to a playback of their upcoming 12th album, *The God Machine* – a blinding reimagining of the bombastic, straight-ahead power metal they championed throughout the 90s.

Their first full album in seven years (2019's *Legacy Of The Dark Lands* was attributed to the 'Blind Guardian Twilight Orchestra'), it may even be the heaviest record Blind Guardian have made since their epic 1995 breakthrough, *Imaginations From The Other Side*. But even as the beer flows readily and Hansi cracks jokes about how it feels to finally play international shows for the first time in almost five years, it soon becomes apparent that it's been anything but smooth sailing for the singer.

"While writing the album, my mother passed away after a long period of suffering," he says, and the easy smile on his face disappears. "Naturally, that has an impact on everything else, as does the fact I was referred to therapy to process it all. But you have to keep going; it becomes almost therapeutic, capturing some of the emotions I was going through. It was the same story when we did *Somewhere Far Beyond* – some of the pieces I wrote were inspired by my father passing away."

Released 30 years apart, both *Somewhere Far Beyond* and *The God Machine* mark major stylistic turning points for Blind Guardian. Back in 1992, the band were still outliers in Germany's thrash/speed metal scene, and *Somewhere Far Beyond* was the point they fully embraced power metal and became one of the genre's biggest champions. "We knew we were not directly doing music in the direction of Kreator or Destruction, as much as we liked those bands," Hansi admits. "When Helloween made *Walls Of Jericho* [in 1985], it opened up a whole bigger game. It didn't matter if you made thrash metal, speed metal or black metal – it was *all* heavy metal."

"I WAS AN ALIEN IN MY OWN MUSIC"

HANSI KÜRSCH

The God Machine sees Blind Guardian changing direction again. After working on 2019's *Legacy Of The Dark Lands* with the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, Hansi says he will be happy if he doesn't see another orchestra "for the next 20 years". The record took the symphonic inclinations they had introduced on 1998's epic *Nightfall In Middle-Earth* to their natural conclusion, and was an epic undertaking – a double album based on the character Solomon Kane, a creation of *Conan The Barbarian* mastermind Robert E. Howard. But it was also a colossal pain in the ass, as Hansi was the only member who performed on the album, meaning the others were left twiddling their thumbs.

"I was an alien in my own music," the singer admits. "Classical music is composed in an entirely different way to metal. When I have those aggressive guitars, I can really cast myself into it and feed on the energy. An orchestra is this great organic beast and it takes a long time to master that, so it was a painful process."

Even as they were developing *Legacy Of The Dark Lands*, Blind Guardian had begun writing songs for *The God Machine*. As such, the songs *Architects Of Doom* and *Secrets* ▶



Blind Guardian (left to right): André Olbrich, Hansi Kürsch, Frederik Ehmke, Marcus Siepen



Of *The American Gods* still bear the prog songwriting and orchestral flourishes of their more recent records. It was album opener *Deliver Us From Evil* that proved to be a real game changer.

"It really took off in the studio," Hansi recalls. "We had a production meeting and everyone agreed – we wanted a 'let your hair down' album more than anything else. *The God Machine* is a new beginning for Blind Guardian."

Hansi is both amiable and reserved, measuring his words carefully and deftly steering away from personal subjects. He declines to discuss his former side-project, Demons & Wizards, who split after guitarist Jon Schaffer was arrested for participating in the insurrection at the Capitol Building in Washington D.C. last year ("It's an open case; I believe he deserves the right to express himself, to explain his side, and we wouldn't want to interfere with that," he says). He speaks of his parents fondly, but doesn't want to dwell on their passing, preferring to focus on their lives and the impact they had on him.

"Both my parents had to struggle to survive in different ways," he says. "They worked to feed their children. I know what it means to be poor and in desperate situations, but my parents never gave up and that fostered my personality."

Born into a working class family, Hansi shared a room with his two sisters and brother "for at least 12 years of [my] life," in the suburb of Lank-Latum, north of Dusseldorf. For someone who would grow up to sing about orcs and elves, the young Hansi was surprisingly athletic. Rather than burying his nose in fiction, he spent his days playing with his friends, though a little bit of fairytale magic crept in. "I played football in the shadow of a castle and there was a 1,000-year-old wall just opposite my house," he says. "It all helped increase my raging imagination!"

"I PLAYED FOOTBALL IN THE SHADOW OF A CASTLE"

HANSI KÜRSCH

From the sprawling Black Forest (the setting of many of the fairytales by the Brothers Grimm) to the innumerable castles dotted throughout the countryside (including Neuschwanstein, the basis for Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* castle), Hansi was acutely aware that Germany was the land of fairytales. So it was almost inevitable that he would grow to love the fantasy genre, which carried over into his music.

While Blind Guardian aren't renowned for soul-searching lyrics and candid confessional songs, ardent fans will point out their capacity for exploring complicated topics and emotions through a high fantasy filter. To wit, fan-favourite *Valhalla* isn't a song about Vikings and epic battles – it's a song wherein the narrator muses on the demise of his culture (the fact that said narrator is a wizard is neither here nor there).

Similarly, *Let It Be No More* on Blind Guardian's new record contends with the conflicting emotions arising from Hansi's mother's passing, albeit through a narrative inspired by Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers*, a novel about life on Earth after a rapture-like event.

"The story deals with the idea of who is really left behind – is it the ones who pass on, or the ones who stay?" Hansi says. "But *Let It Be No More* was actually written by André [Olbrich, guitars]. He was there and could focus on



Cruising on the picturesque Rhine, Hansi and drummer Frederik provide an interview with a view

what I was going through, when my mother was not in the best condition."

While grief has doubtlessly fed into the creation of *The God Machine*, Hansi doesn't see the album as being inherently darker than any of Blind Guardian's other releases. Rather, he sees *The God Machine* as a much-needed stylistic and emotional cleanse for the band, while maintaining their fantastical elements. Inspirations behind songs range from Arthur Miller play *The Crucible*, to Patrick Rothfuss trilogy *The Kingkiller Chronicle*, and Neil Gaiman novel *American Gods*.

"I still try to build a glimpse of hope into even the darkest song," he admits. "Whatever happens in our lives, we can't exclude that in our songwriting. But going through a depressive episode doesn't necessarily mean you make darker music."

Clocking in at 51 minutes, *The God Machine* represents the heaviest, most direct record Blind Guardian have made in decades. Boasting the incisive speed of their early years, the bombast of their 90s breakthrough, and the epic songwriting of their recent releases (including a few orchestral elements – clearly a hard habit to break), it feels like the most comprehensive statement of Blind Guardian's career to date.

For all the similarities surrounding the creation of *Somewhere Far Beyond* and *The God Machine*, Hansi acknowledges that he was a different person 30 years ago. The way he makes music – and processes grief – has changed immeasurably, and for the better.

"When my father died, there was a lot of growing up involved," he says. "Back then, when I had a problem it was like I would be smashing my head against a brick wall until I made it through, rather than looking for the door. Now if I run into the same wall, I get back up and look for that door." ■

THE GOD MACHINE IS OUT SEPTEMBER 2 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST



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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: WILL IRELAND



MACHINE HEAD

Of Kingdom And Crown

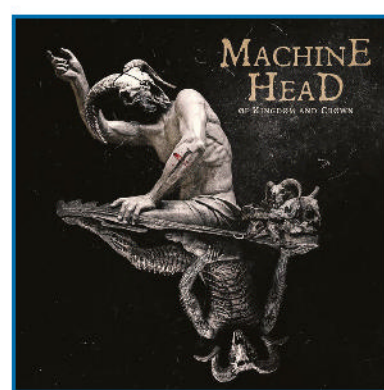
NUCLEAR BLAST

Robb Flynn retools and returns to his heavy metal essence

ON ONE HAND, it's absolutely to Machine Head's credit that you go into their 10th studio album with no idea what you're going to get. On the other, there's the sense that their various musical experiments and continually rolling cast of members have resulted in a fairly lopsided musical output in the last decade. Robb Flynn and co have proved

they can dip their toes into other genres, and while they can be a decent rap metal band, an adequate radio rock outfit and a reasonable folk punk collective, it's fair to say the only thing they are world-class at is groovy, tightly wound, tornadoes of riffs and fury, and classic, thrashing, heavy metal majesty.

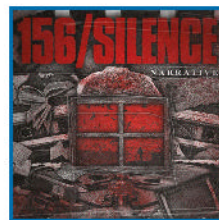
“THE FURIOUS OPENING FEELS LIKE THE WORK OF A BAND WITH A POINT TO PROVE”



Let's make no apologies for hoping that *Of Kingdom And Crown* would see the band lean fully back into the celebrated style of *The Blackening*. It's also worth mentioning that this is Machine Head's first attempt at the notoriously tricky concept album, with an intertwining story of two men: a murderer, and the lover of one of his victims. Imagine the relief, then, when opener *Slaughter The Martyr* comes in over the 10-minute mark and sounds exactly like all the elements of prime Machine Head. Even better news is that it's followed by *Choke On The Ashes Of Your Hate*, which recalls the most frantic bits of debut album *Burn My Eyes*, and features an



Machine Head have regained their metal bearings



156/SILENCE

Narrative

SHARPTONE

Pennsylvania's metalcore brutalists beef up their arsenal

After years of homogeneity, there is now a spate of bands taking metalcore back to its caustic roots. While 156/Silence's third album might be less frenetic than those currently innovating, their more direct approach still hits with the subtlety of a wrecking ball. *The Rodents Race*, with its simple yet effective riff, recalls the destructive room-wrecking thrills of Slipknot's self-titled classic. But it's the electronic detours that really mark the quintet out from their peers. *To Take Your Place* and *Tell The Reason* mix the synth pulse of Health with the aggro bravado of Knocked Loose. 156/Silence may be operating within a strong scene, but *Narrative* proves that they can certainly hold their own.



FOR FANS OF: Vein.fm, Knocked Loose, Jesus Piece

REMFY DEDMAN



ALLEN/OLZON

Army Of Dreamers

FRONTIERS MUSIC

Symphony X and former Nightwish singers dial down the contrast

The formula of 'put two amazing singers on an album together' seems thrilling at first, and who's better qualified to make glossy melodic metal than Anette Olzon and Russell Allen? But here, some of that lustre has worn off. While the pair are

undeniably fantastic, they're also two sides of the same coin; with little contrast between their voices, songs like *So Quiet Here* and *Look At Me* lack the dynamics to stop them from becoming repetitive. If you're a fan of big voices, and big, headbang-inducing choruses, then this will do the job, but ultimately *Army Of Dreamers* see the two singers' capacity for light and shade under-utilised.



FOR FANS OF: The Dark Element, Symphony X, Amaranthe

CATHERINE MORRIS



BECOMING THE ARCHETYPE

Children Of The Great Extinction

SOLID STATE

Tech-metalcore's sci-fi aficionados suffer system overload

Screeching, escalating guitars; a monolithic breakdown with cries of 'This world was dead from the start!'; a soothing yet anthemic chorus. *The Dead World*, the opening track on BTA's first album in 10 years, pulls out everything you need for meaty metal-core. It also picks up where the trio's breakdown-added tech left off in 2012. Unfortunately, it's that same genre allegiance that becomes their comeback's downfall. *The Lost Colony*, *The Remnant* and *The Calling* add nothing that we haven't already heard on the first song, with the only wrinkles coming from *The Awakening*'s hyper-heavy doom-djent and the symphonic stomp of *The Sacrament*. Ultimately, this will prove a slog for all but the most ardent of acolytes.



FOR FANS OF: Fallujah, Threat Signal, Fellsilent

MATT MILLS

unbelievable, face-melting solo from new guitarist Wacław 'Vogg' Kiełtyka. Both Vogg and session drummer Navene Koperweiss – formerly of Animals As Leaders – make impressive debuts here, the latter pummelling his kit relentlessly on the brutal *Become The Firestorm*. Having been written off by many in the aftermath of 2018's divisive *Catharsis*, everything so far feels like the work of a band with a point to prove.

After that furious opening, the band go for a more epic and grandiose feel. *My Hands Are Empty* is a stirring, anguished statement and *Kill Thy Enemies* is an intense, mid-paced stomper, full of propulsive grooves. As good as all of that is, this isn't quite a perfect return to form. A slight bit of trimming could have

streamlined the album's exhaustive running time, and the chorus of the otherwise excellent *No Gods, No Masters* is one of a couple of more anthemic moments that doesn't grab you as firmly as Machine Head at their best. But, at this stage in their career, with songs such as the magnificently meaty, groove-ridden *Bloodshot* and *Rotten* more the norm than the exception on this record, it's safe to say that Machine Fucking Head are back. *Of Kingdom And Crown* sounds like an essential part of their canon. Machine Head weren't entirely broke, but they've been fixed all the same.



FOR FANS OF: Sepultura, Lamb Of God, Trivium

STEPHEN HILL

OZZY OSBOURNE

Patient Number 9

EPIC

The Prince Of Darkness gathers the greats and goes for glory

AT THIS POINT, you can say whatever you like about Ozzy. He's a bit deaf from over 50 years of being an absolute legend, co-architect of heavy metal and survivor of multiple near-death experiences and, famously, can't fucking hear you. Whether the great man will ever make a full return to live performance seems questionable, but he deserves a huge amount of credit for powering through those well-documented health issues and recording a second studio album in two years. Even more deserving of praise is the fact that *Patient Number 9* is really, really good. By ditching the streamlined, radio-banger approach of its predecessor in favour of a darker, heavier, more nuanced strain of epic metal, Ozzy has conjured some of his strongest material in decades.

What *Patient...* does have in common with 2020's *Ordinary Man* is a raft of guest appearances. The stars that lend their talents to these songs are all guitarists, and all of a certain vintage, with Zakk Wylde the most prominent among them. The result is aimed squarely at both old- and new-school Ozzy fans and the classic rock firmament in general. The opening title track provides an extravagant showcase for the legendary Jeff Beck, with Ozzy in fine voice amid a shape-shifting, prog-tinged arrangement, with a killer chorus that doesn't take the expected route, and a woozy folk rock coda. Similarly, Eric Clapton weaves his trademark bluesy licks around *One Of Those Days'* gently lysergic verses and strident, rootsy chorus. Thankfully we're spared any of Eric's 'opinions' on race relations or the efficacy of lockdown measures, and his solo is genuinely great, so small mercies and all that.

The rest of *Patient...* is a feast of effervescent, melodic and often monstrously heavy anthems. *Immortal* has near-chewable echoes of Ozzy's early 80s creative peak, several brilliant riffs and a scorching lead from Pearl Jam's Mike McCready. *Parasite* and *Evil Shuffle* bring Ozzy back together with Zakk, with all the razor-sharp hooks and barbarous, bluesy thunder that fans have come to expect. Bruising, unpredictable and lyrically spiky, *Mr. Darkness* is even better.

The obvious highlight comes when Ozzy joins forces with Tony Iommi, for the first



time ever on one of his solo records. *No Escape From Now* is glorious. Awash with nods to the old days (that *Planet Caravan* vocal effect in particular), it's a doomy, tripped-out labyrinth of ideas, and easily the equal of anything on Black Sabbath's 13. The bruising blues metal of *Degradation Rules* is very nearly as good.

Despite everything you may have heard about Ozzy being on his last legs, *Patient Number 9* unequivocally does not sound like the work of a man living on borrowed time. Instead, it sounds like the Prince of fucking Darkness having an absolutely smashing time, with a bunch of his mates and, weirdly, a newfound sense of artistic ambition.

'Don't forget me, even when I do...' he sings on the gorgeous, Zakk-augmented *Nothing Feels Right*. Daft bastard. As if.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Ghost, Judas Priest
DOM LAWSON

PRESS/ROSS HALFIN

“THE OBVIOUS HIGHLIGHT COMES WHEN OZZY JOINS FORCES WITH TONY IOMMI”

**BLACK MAGNET****Body Prophecy**

20 BUCK SPIN

Industrial hell from the Oklahoma City contamination zones

Violent Mechanix – the title of the second song on Black Magnet's second album – sums up the record with aplomb. Smashing together pulsing electronics, pummeling drums and menacing, often outright hateful vocals that groan and roar like a rusted machine, it's all fused into a chimera of industrial clangour and the uncomfortable angularity of post-punk for a potentially floor-filling listen. There's the drug-addled *Incubate* drawing from early NIN, the tense atmospherics that give way to the rasping *Hermetix* and the gentle but demented lullaby of *Sold Me Sad*. All across *Body Prophecy*, seething noise, skittering synths and distorted vocals pulverise the ears, culminating in an unsettling but compelling listen. Metal club dance anthems never sounded as terrifying or vicious.



FOR FANS OF: Ministry, Nine Inch Nails, Godflesh

WILL MARSHALL

**BLACKLAB****In A Bizarre Dream**

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

Japan's stoner/doom duo introduce some powerful new strains

Osaka doom duo BlackLab take no prisoners on their third album. While the lo-fi approach of their debut *Under The Strawberry Moon* felt fitting, the thick,

churning guitar tone and crushing drum sound of *In A Bizarre Dream* means it packs a much greater wallop. Yuko Morino's voice sounds more assured than ever as she switches between harrowing, throat-shredding shrieks and soaring clean vocals on tracks like bombastic opener *Cold Rain*. It's remarkable how well the duo balance driving anthems like *Abyss Woods* with filthier, more menacing sludge numbers such as *Evil I*, with neither feeling compromised or phoned in. There's even a raucous d-beat banger in *Dark Clouds*, but the biggest surprise is perhaps *Crows, Sparrows And Cats*, a motorik freak-out featuring Stereolab's Lætitia Sadier on vocals. Easily the most robust and powerful record they've released thus far.



FOR FANS OF: Acid King, Serpenticult, Noothgrush

KEZ WHELAN

**BRYMIR****Voices In The Sky**

NAPALM

Enjoyable scattergun chaos from Finnish melodeath veterans

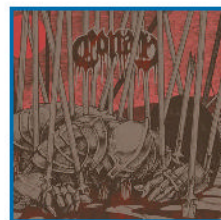
A melodic death metal band from Helsinki, Brymir formed in 2006 while guitarist Joona Björkroth was with Battle Beast, where he remains a touring member. Though their early sound hovered on the fringes of folk metal territory with a nod to cinematic soundscapes, increasingly the five-piece have dialled down such dalliances. Their fourth album lurches crazily between symphonic-sounding melodies, as on the title track and *Rift Between Us*, and the blastbeat-driven death metal growls of *Forged In War*, *Seeds Of Downfall* and

Far From Home, sometimes in the space of a single song. There's no doubt that Brymir are a gifted unit capable of operating within several different styles. *Voices In The Sky* takes you on an unpredictable yet sometimes entertaining ride, but the biggest hindrance is that it simply lacks focus of any kind.



FOR FANS OF: Wintersun, Children Of Bodom, Ensiferum

DAVE LING

**CONAN****Evidence Of Immortality**

NAPALM

Liverpool's doom destroyers find stability but still ring the changes

Conan's fifth full-length is their first to feature the same line-up as the one preceding it. While bassist/producer Chris Fielding has been with the band for almost a decade now, Dread Sovereign drummer Johnny King has also proved a reliable addition since 2017, and the faster pace he brought to previous album *Existential Void* Guardian is explored even further on songs like the d-beat-powered *Ritual Of Anonymity* and *Levitation Hoax*, as he manages to sneak some lightspeed blasts into the band's trademark groove. The crushing closer *Grief Sequence*, meanwhile, is one of the most leaden, hypnotic tracks they've ever put to tape, verging on funeral doom territory with its glacial pace and mournful keys. There's just enough variation here to keep things interesting, while still feeling very much like a classic, reliably flattening Conan record.



FOR FANS OF: Electric Wizard, High On Fire, Thergothon

KEZ WHELAN



Blind Guardian's photo gimmick was a little on the nose

BLIND GUARDIAN**The God Machine**

NUCLEAR BLAST

*Blistering comeback from Germany's most powerful***A PERENNIAL****BENCHMARK**

for power metal excellence, Blind Guardian have arguably tested their fans' patience in recent times. Although plainly an impressive achievement, 2019's *Legacy Of The Dark Lands* (billed as Blind Guardian Twilight Orchestra) offered 75 minutes of drumless, guitar-free indulgence that was big, bombastic and ambitious, but also a bit boring. In stark and rather glorious contrast, *The God Machine* has clearly been designed to smash naysayers' faces in, while reminding the faithful that no one can touch this band when they're on top form. Seven years on from the last 'proper' Blind Guardian album, *Beyond The Red Mirror*, Hansi Kürsch and his comrades have located a generous supply of the elixir of youth and have each chugged a few pints of it. Their 11th album is an outright, spine-shattering triumph as a result.

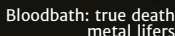
Free from any conceptual trappings, *...Machine* keeps it straightforward and startlingly brutal. These are all ornate and explosive heavy metal anthems – some with overtly progressive leanings and an abundance of drama and dynamics, some with a simple agenda of crushing skulls and exposing everyone else as lightweights. With Hansi's trademark vocal harmonies sounding more powerful than ever, this also feels like a purposeful restating of musical values. The opening brace of *Deliver Us From Evil* and *Damnation* is hewn from the same raw materials that birthed 1992's seminal *Somewhere Far Beyond*, but BG have never punched with this much power before. Even more progressive moments like the Neil Gaiman-inspired *Secrets Of The American Gods* have sharp edges and dark intentions, while *Blood Of The Elves* is a shiny speed metal sledgehammer, wielded by European metal's most skilled assassins. The best Blind Guardian album since *Imaginations From The Other Side*.



FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, Helloween, Persuader

DOM LAWSON





Survival Of The Sickest

Death metal thoroughbreds keep the infernal flames burning

"SURVIVAL OF THE SICKEST"

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO



DREADNOUGHT

The Endless

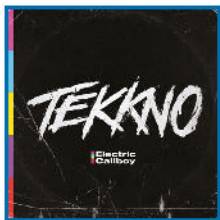
PROFOUND LORE

Colorado-based progressives make a miasma out of mournfulness

Where Dreadnought's previous albums offered solid foundations of progressive melancholy, their fifth incorporates a diverse array of extreme metal styles in a cerebral sound that ebbs and flows between mellifluous meandering and tumultuous rage. Guitarist/vocalist Kelly Schilling offers a standout performance; she's a stirring storyteller, whether at a clean, delicate whisper or a harsh roar. She's at her most poignant on the record's title track, a grim fable ending in shrill cataclysm. Songs such as *Midnight Moon* offer dreamlike escapism and synth/organ-soaked adventures that build to huge moments, but the songs tend to meander. Dreadnought's fairytale-like narrative provides spellbinding moments but needs stronger structure, marking *The Endless* as just another addition to their catalogue of capable but too frequently forgettable prog.

FOR FANS OF: Opeth, Dvne, Mournful Congregation

TOM O'BOYLE



ELECTRIK CALLBOY

Tekkno

CENTURY MEDIA

Germany's electrocore jokers wise up but keep the party going

The band formerly known as Eskimo Callboy kick off their latest in true party-

loving form with all four recent singles including punk-pop gem *Fuckboi*. With their strange breed of batty, fist-pumping electronicore, the Germans are on a mission to make people smile. *Tekkno* sees them swapping offensive topics in favour of cheeky jokes and wickedly catchy choruses. The result is an absolute blast. *Neon* and *Hurrikan* may edge into Eurovision territory, and *Tekkno Train* brings terrible lyrics to a whole new level with grin-inducing death metal roars of 'Choo choo', but it's impossible to deny the dancefloor beats and breakdowns. In an often overly earnest world, this band's refusal to take themselves seriously is a breath of fresh air.

FOR FANS OF: I See Stars, Enter Shikari, Attack Attack!

NIK YOUNG



FALLUJAH

Empyrean

NUCLEAR BLAST

San Fran technicians keep the evolution rolling

Ridiculous levels of skill are so commonplace these days that focusing on imaginative songwriting is really the only way to stand out from the tech-death crowd. Fallujah nailed that approach as far back as 2014's *The Flesh Prevails*, but the Bay Area virtuosos have continued to embrace progress, and *Empyrean* is another great leap forward. The expected, blurred-finger savagery is still integral to the likes of opener *The Bitter Taste Of Clarity* and the perfectly succinct *Radiant Ascension*. If you want blastbeats and impossible feats of fret-bothering, Fallujah have them covered. Meanwhile, a collective fascination with

taking the progressive, scenic route ensures that more expansive blowouts like *Embrace Oblivion*, *Into The Eventide* and the windswept, post-metal sprawl of *Celestial Resonance* audibly reach a higher plane of heaviness.

FOR FANS OF: Rivers Of Nihil, Ne Obliviscaris, Obscura

DOM LAWSON



FEATHER MOUNTAIN

To Exit A Maelstrom

SELF-RELEASED

Danish prog metallers chart a deeply emotional journey

This Danish prog metal quartet's follow-up to their 2019 debut, *Nidus*, is crafted from unapologetically personal threads. From the haunting melodies of opener *August Mantra* to the explosive turn of *Beneath Your Pale Face* and the sickening tension of *Air Hunger*, *To Exit A Maelstrom* embarks on a captivating exploration of melody, atmosphere and the storm of emotions experienced during the gradual loss of a close family member to Alzheimer's. The album's consistent and well-measured ebb and flow of diversity and melodic intensity is hypnotic, cascading effortlessly across expansive moments fuelled by vitriolic anger and frustration and sections of vulnerability and despair. Metal is no stranger to the topics of sickness or death, of course, but, led by Mikkel Aaen Lohmann's highly emotive vocal performance, this is a powerful experience that induces an equally powerful emotional response.

FOR FANS OF: A Perfect Circle, Porcupine Tree, Esoterica

LUKE MILNE

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'



ANIIMALIA

Pressure Points

MARSHALL

This British alt-rock band's EP brings the likes of Halestorm to mind with its mix of prowling, feisty, and catchy flavours, but it's *Silver Linings* that reveals their true potential. More of that, please.

NIK YOUNG



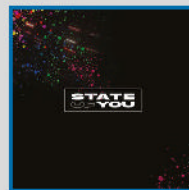
HOLDING ABSENCE / ALPHA WOLF

The Lost & The Longing

SHARPTONE

This split births an electric alliance. Alpha Wolf's frenzied riffs and slam-worthy grooves are the nihilistic yin to Holding Absence's yang of searing cleans and chest-beating anthemia.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN



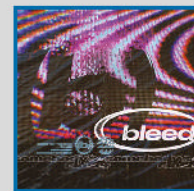
STATE OF YOU

State Of You

SILENT CULT

A collection of former members of notable mid-10s UK hardcore luminaries, such as Polar and Hildamay, State Of You can still cut it in today's scene. The formula hasn't changed much, but this is satisfyingly gruff hardcore.

STEPHEN HILL



BLEED

Somebody's Closer

20 BUCK SPIN

This Texan quartet have a solid 90s grunge/alt rock aesthetic (think Helmet colliding with Hum), but they make up for their lack of originality with their songwriting chops. Strong word of mouth makes Bleed a band to watch out for.

REMFREY DEDMAN



SPITE

Dedication To Flesh

RISE

Slamming breakdowns, guttural roars and toilet bowl gurgles: Spite have it all for the deathcore fanatic. The Californians execute the basics well, but there are too few ideas here for any real staying power.

WILL MARSHALL



WAR RIPPER

Strength In Numbers

DYING VICTIMS

War Ripper is Toxic Holocaust's Joel Grind getting back to basics. Back to playing and recording everything himself and when the only Ds in his life were Discharge, Disgust, Disrupt, Disfear, the d-beat and on his report card.

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO



The Callous Daoboys rediscover the mirth in matchcore

THE CALLOUS DAOBOYS

Celebrity Therapist

MNRK HEAVY

Atlanta's mathcore anarchists make their bid for genre dominance

ALL TOO OFTEN, when you see bands that specialise in quirky songtitles, their wordplay proves more entertaining than their music. This isn't true of The Callous Daoboys. Their third album has tracks called *The Elephant Man In The Room* and *Beautiful Dude Missile*, these madcap monikers complimented by some of the most insane yet compelling mathcore to come from the US since The Dillinger Escape Plan broke up.



The Atlanta rabble use a six-piece line-up, spoken word and an onslaught of samples to bring their lunacy to life, with all three raging unabashedly on opening salvo *Violent Astrology*. Following the sounds of record scratching, barely 10 seconds of polyrhythmic percussion, squealing guitars and seething vocals strike. Then there's a funky bass lick. Then there's a metal break exacerbated by ranting and the stabbing violin notes from *Psycho*. It's batshit – but you remember all of it.

And that's just the first song. *Field Sobriety Practice* is a surprisingly slow

burn that escalates from swaying funk music to an apex cacophonous enough to make Converge want to pack it in. Meanwhile, *Title Track* unloads a dollop



of baroque pop pomp, plummeting from rage in alien time signatures to clean-sung 4/4 loveliness. *What Is Delicious? Who Swarms?* switches between melodic music with jagged guitars and deathcore beatdowns, before *Star Baby* commences with a screaming parody of

those old "I want my MTV" ads. Every entry is hectic in ways that the album's hitherto unimagined.

As a result, *Celebrity Therapist* deserves to go down as an idiosyncratic starmaker. And, in an era where the likes of Rolo Tomassi, Seeyou.spacecowboy and Pupil Slicer are helping mathcore reach its healthiest state in 20 years, The Callous Daoboys seem perfectly placed for breakout success.

FOR FANS OF: Rolo Tomassi, The Dillinger Escape Plan, Mr. Bungle

MATT MILLS



HEADS FOR THE DEAD

The Great Conjuratation

TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

*Swedish-flavoured death metal
from an international ensemble*

Heads For The Dead may be a multinational band, but from the first HM-2-soaked note it's clear Sweden is in their DNA, with elements of Nihilist and Dismember. *The Jewel Of The Seven Stars* hints at Darkthrone's death metal era via The Ruins Of Beverast, and their cover of Roky Erickson's *Bloody Hammer* could be taken from the last Darkthrone. *The Fog* is classic 90s gothic metal – like Samael jamming with Chorus Of Ruin – while *The Bloodline* is rooted as much in black metal as it is in death. *The Great Conjunction* may have the Sunlight Studios sound, but it's no retro exercise.

FOR FANS OF: Dismember, Samael, Dissection

ALASTAIR RIDDELL



HIEROPHANT

Death Sieges

SEASON OF MIST

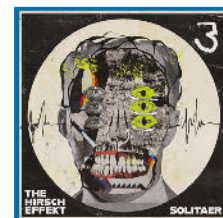
Shapeshifting quartet undergo a blackened death reinvention

Like repeat callers to the careers advisor, these Italians can't decide what they want to be. While their hardcore beginnings may have been confined to history's backwaters, along with the memory of their original vocalist, Hierophant's transition to death metal, which began on 2016's *Mass Grave*, still remains incomplete. *Death Siege* finds the quartet draping

a coarse, blackened gown over the fast-flowing magma of that predecessor. Truncated salvos of grind and ersatz Bolt Thrower-style grooves now make way for unholy paroxysms of merciless riffage, infernal blasts and heretical reptilian shrieks, with some Trey Azagthoth divebombs thrown in. This newfound hell suits Hierophant; let's hope that this time they don't hotfoot it.

FOR FANS OF: Diocletian, Angelcorpse, Sarcófago

SPENCER GRADY



THE HIRSCH EFFEKT

Solitaer

LONG BRANCH

German prog/mathcore weirdos
compile their odds and ends

This genre-destroying trio used the lockdown to their advantage, each writing one song for the band by themselves. The resulting trilogy opens *Solitaire* – and is among The Hirsch Effekt's broadest-reaching work. *Palingenesis* is a riff blitzkrieg so erratic that it belongs on BTBAM's *Colors*. *Nares* plummets from post-rock to Lamb Of God-worthy grooves, while jazz and mathcore trade off on *Amorphus*. The compilation's latter half is last year's *Gregaer* EP, which strips old tracks down into orchestral rockers. It's less metal and more Frank Zappa noodling. However, so unbound is these maestros' scope that not even this tangent feels jarring. These may be titbits, but it's the best demonstration of their range to date.

FOR FANS OF: Between
The Buried And Me,
Panzerballett,
Seeyouspacecowboy

MATT MILLS



Five Finger Death Punch: living their best lives

FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH

AfterLife
BETTER NOISE

Vegas metal heroes roll the dice on album No.9

THE BIGGEST STICK

detractors like to beat Five Finger Death Punch with is that the band's sound has largely remained the same throughout their career. Never mind that their swaggering lyrics and chugging riffs have netted them Gold and Platinum records and carried them into arenas around the world, apparently someone out there is holding out for 5FDP blastbeats and polyrhythms.

AfterLife doesn't go that far, but it is more experimental than past efforts. Play singles *AfterLife*, *IOU* or *Welcome To The Circus* and everything is as you'd expect it to be; the riffs chug like a freight train, the lyrics are daft but insidiously catchy ('Ticky ticky tasket / Time to burn the casket' from *...Circus* will haunt your dreams) and even the loss of guitarist Jason Hook hasn't stopped the band from breaking out some six-string wizardry on the title track for that proper stadium feel.

But then you move into the album's mid-section, which brings in outside influences to merge with the 5FDP sound, for better or worse. *Times Like These* and *Thanks For Asking* both use synthetic beats to introduce pop sensibilities, and the latter in particular feels like 5FDP taking on Lil Nas X's *Old Town Road*. *Judgment Day* could be pulled from Korn's *Issues* and Ivan's vocal even veers towards rap. Closing track *The End* even introduces strings, providing a nice crescendo to the record and ending on a high.

While a sonic roll of the dice, *AfterLife* doesn't bet everything on 5FDP changing overnight. The usual mix of chest-beating metal bangers and heartfelt ballads are still present and correct, but at this point it's hard to tell whether the stylistic and production experiments that fill the album's middle-ground are leading to something, or will end up as desert carrion.

FOR FANS OF: Ice Nine Kills, Parkway Drive, Slipknot
RICH HOBSON



LONG DISTANCE CALLING

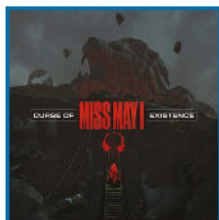
Eraser
EARMUSIC

Inventive instrumentalists paint a grave picture of life on Earth

The eighth album from this German post-rock quartet may seem like a chillaxing ride of instrumentalism at first listen, but hidden with these mesmerising riffs is a more urgent message. Each of the nine tracks is dedicated to an endangered species, from rhinos and bees (definitely not wasps, they can fuck right off) to possibly the most metal of all of Earth's creatures: the sloth. This isn't a soppy plea but a poignant soundtrack that paints an uncanny sonic portrait of these incredible creatures and the severity of their circumstances. Not that we're biased towards these animals specifically, but the sax solo on *Sloth* is particularly spot on. Listen and weep.

FOR FANS OF: God Is An Astronaut, Katatonia, If These Trees Could Talk

HYWEL DAVIES



MISS MAY I

Curse Of Existence
SHARPTONE

Metalcore stalwarts recharge their atmosphere and aggression

Not unlike the title track of 2017's *Shadows Inside*, *Curse Of Existence*'s opener, *A Smile That Does Not Exist*, unleashes the same kind of scintillating riff-extravaganza, as Miss May I's seventh album proves an unflinching and soaring experience that

keeps the band marching on. Like its predecessor, the melodies are assured. *Earth Shaker* and *Free Fall* revel in rhythmic grooves, blazing guitars and huge choruses, while that message of defiance and resistance surges through the coruscating likes of *Bleed Together* and *Born Destroyers*. Vocalist Levi Benton sounds better than ever, his gut-punching roars and gleaming cleans demonstrating the five-piece's ability to veer seamlessly between ambient melodic metalcore and arresting introspection.

FOR FANS OF: August Burns Red, Memphis May Fire, The Devil Wears Prada

SOPHIE MAUGHAN



MONSTER TRUCK Warriors

BMG

Canadian classic rock revivalists keep the spark plugs firing

After the simmering 70s rock and 80s stadium charisma of 2018's *True Rockers*, *Warriors* is exactly what we've come to expect from Monster Truck – a well-oiled rock'n'roll machine with a Southern flavour. 'We fight till we die' sings Jon Harvey on the opening title track. It's a statement of their resilience and their work ethic as self-proclaimed roadaholics. *Golden Woman* and *Get My Things & Go* are ready-made for whiskey-soaked dive bars, while *Love & Time* builds to a grand finale. The band's fondness for country is also apparent, and it suits them well on *Country Livin'*, all slide guitar and big choruses proving that revivalism is alive and well.

FOR FANS OF: Alter Bridge, Black Stone Cherry, ZZ Top
HOLLY WRIGHT

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe



DEATH SCYTHE

Killing For Pleasure Forever
SELF-RELEASED

These Mexicans set out to play "pure melodic death metal", but here they endow their guitars with traditional Mayan melodies, making them standouts in the dense melodeath pack.

MATT MILLS



ENSANGUINATE

Eldritch Anatomy
EMANZIPATION PRODUCTIONS

Taking on the thrashiest parts of the mid-90s Swedish scene, the biggest asset of Slovenian debutants Ensanguinate is how impressively tight and menacing they already are.

OLIVIER BADIN



REINCARNATED

Of Boötes Void Death Spell
INHUMAN ASSAULT

Delivered with a lobotomised, sluggish swagger, this filthy Thai crew's death/doom takes no prisoners. Almost overburdened with gruesome riffs, this is raw, grubby and utterly convincing.

DOM LAWSON



MORBID EVILS

Supernatural
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Rotten Sound frontman wades once more through the muck

When Cephalic Carnage or, more recently, Gatecreeper use their regular weaponry to explore doomier or sludgier avenues, they do so under their regular brand but on a limited EP. While using similar sonic sledgehammers, Keijo Niinimaa, vocalist for Finland's premiere grindcore unit Rotten Sound, vowed to create his own vehicle for the same purposes instead. Don't let the lack of blastbeats and the overabundance of morose, monotone and lysergic tempos fool you; the result is droning, strangely spacious sounding yet extremely oppressive and brutal nevertheless. Morbid Evil's third full-length in seven years is the kind of album that will make you feel like you're slowly drowning in dark, cold waters.

FOR FANS OF: *Thou, Grief, Cough*

OLIVIER BADIN



MOTORPSYCHO

Ancient Astronauts
RUNE GRAMMOFON

Norway's veteran prog explorers go wild yet again

A model of consistency for 33 years, Motorpsycho have approached their 22nd studio album with the same sense of wonder that has fuelled the majority of their extraordinary catalogue. Less streamlined and belligerent than last year's

riff-heavy *Kingdom Of Oblivion*, *Ancient Astronauts* captures the Norwegians in full freewheeling prog mode. *The Ladder* is a slowly escalating rush of red-eyed riffing and electrified ensemble chemistry; *The Flower Of Awareness* is a dreamy, pastoral psych interlude; *Mona Lisa/Azrael* is an audacious, rambling epic that builds to a wild crescendo of high-velocity jazz fusion, before a graceful and melodic return to earth. It ends with *Chariot Of The Sun*, a slow-burning, cinematic sprawl that spends several of its 22 minutes sounding like a krautrock Kyuss. As ever, Motorpsycho make it all sound as natural and as mesmerising as can be.

■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Opeth, Mastodon, Earthless

DOM LAWSON



OFFERNAT
All Colours Retract

SELF-RELEASED

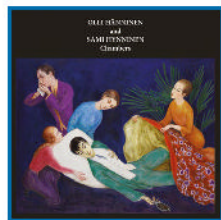
Sludge-laden Danes expand their gloomy palette

This Danish trio's 2021 EP was a reasonable slice of punky sludge, but their debut full-length is far more formidable. These songs are much longer and more elaborate, balancing the punk aggression of the EP with a sombre, melancholy approach. With the portentous atmosphere and slow, cathartic riffs, the most obvious reference point is Neurosis, with even the burly dual vocals sounding uncannily similar to messrs Kelly and Von Till. Offernat still inject enough outside influence to keep things interesting, be it the howling black metal in *The Winds* or desolate post-rock passages in *Harvest Return*. Pacing issues and a few clunky lyrical couplets hold *All*

Colours Retract back, but it's certainly a big step up. If the leap between this and album two is as stratospheric as the distance from their EP, Offernat could grow into a force to be reckoned with.

FOR FANS OF: Neurosis, Minsk, Downfall Of Gaia

KEZ WHELAN



**OLLI HÄNNINEN AND
SAMI HYNNINEN**

Chambers

*Former Reverend Bizarre frontman
crashes through the looking glass*

Sami Hynninen's work with Finnish doom saviours Reverend Bizarre earned him a lot of residual goodwill, even after his twisted muse pushed him into the far more radical and bizarre creative trajectory of Opium Warlords. On this collaboration with a fellow Finnish maverick, Sami travels further down the avant-garde rabbit hole before finally disappearing over the edge of reason. Explicitly attempting to create a type of music that has never been heard before, perhaps the most curious thing about *Chambers* is that it isn't entirely unlistenable. Among the layers of intriguing sound you might sense bastardised influences from power-electronic noise and industrial as well as hip hop, synth pop, free jazz, drone, ambient, neoclassical and electronica, in a spirit of mad spontaneity and wilful perversity. Its concerted singularity is laudable, but you're unlikely to listen to it more than once.

FOR FANS OF: *Psychic TV*, *Laibach*, *Coil*

CHRIS CHANTLER



HEILUNG

Drif
SEASON OF MIST

World-straddling pagan shamans host a gathering of the tribes

FOR ALL THE bands claiming a sense of ritual, spectacle or transcendence, precious few achieve it like Heilung. But while their striking aesthetic makes the metal scene their spiritual home, there's relatively little that shrieks 'metal up your ass!' beyond the occasional, goblin-esque vocal turn. Becalms is an undeniably *heavy* release, this is a sense of drama, historical resonance and depth – a carefully woven tapestry of textures and inferences wherein a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, or the unearthly sustain of a single note in your chest.

Opener *Asja* begins with a foreboding drone'n'groan before Maria Franz lends her crystalline voice to the mix, while elsewhere *Tenet* and *Buslas Bann* serve as exercises in sheer hypnotic power and *Keltenrauer* brings history to spine-tingling life with its mix of stoic narration, clashing swords and chaotic battle cries. According to the band, the word 'drif' means 'gathering' – an apt term for a trio who throng their stages with additional bodies and invite audiences to join the wild atavistic throes of something beyond the reach of typical modern experience. But the title's meaning also stretches further: a gathering of influences that confidently reaches beyond northern Europe to encompass other great civilisations. This, conceivably, serves as a thumbing of the nose to the racist slackjaws who might try to claim Heilung's deep dives into history and heritage as their 'own'.

More than this, though, *Drift* feels like a natural evolutionary step for a band who understand the unique power of story and song, and how such forces can transcend borders and language to bind us all together – wherever we're from, and whoever we are.

FOR FANS OF: *Wardruna, Exuma, Forndom*
ALEX DELLER



The Hu reach out across the ages

THE HU

Rumble Of Thunder

BETTER NOISE

Mongolian folk metal sensations add a dash of modernity

THE HU'S UNLIKELY leap through the metal ranks remains one of 2019's brightest feelgood stories. Even before the release of their captivating debut, *The Gereg*, the genre-smashing Mongolians had whipped the internet into a frenzy, notching up tens of millions of streams across YouTube and social media. It was anything but a gimmick. Blending rock and metal elements with traditional Mongolian instruments and the art of throat singing, they conjured an enthralling sound rooted in fist-raising chants and rampaging tempos that felt like a marauding horde thundering across the steppe. That they struck such a resonant chord throughout the global metal community, while singing exclusively in their native tongue, spoke to the intrinsic power of the music.

Whereas their debut felt like a metal album played on folk instruments, *Rumble Of Thunder* is a decidedly more modern affair, opening with the one-two punch of *This Is Mongol* and *YUT Hövende*. Stridently forceful and coursing with swagger and energy, both tracks erupt

with grinding waves of riffage and a full drum kit along with the traditional string and wind instruments. *Rumble...* renews its predecessor's affinity for flint-eyed rockers such as *Shihi Hutu*, *Sell The World*

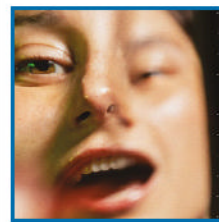
and *Black Thunder*, but it also delivers more depth and variety than *The Gereg*.

At times they step entirely away from metal in favour of zippy, pop-oriented numbers like *Triangle*, *Teach Me* and *Bii Biyelgee* – a booming folk pop gem with a hip-swivelling spontaneity that will reduce crowds

to a joyful, sweaty mess. There's even a stab at balladry in the form of *Mother Nature* – perhaps the only moment when understanding the lyrics might be critical to appreciating the track. Nonetheless, here The Hu have easily sidestepped the dreaded 'sophomore slump', delivering an infectious clutch of serotonin-inducing bangers that establish the band as both gifted songwriters and forward-thinking innovators.

FOR FANS OF: Tengger Cavalry, Wagakki Band, Eluveitie

JOE DALY



PENCEY SLOE

Neglect

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Galic dreamgazers get illustrious seals of approval

This Parisian dreamgaze duo's second album explores identity and nature vs nurture through layers of reverberating guitars and gorgeous synths. *Neglect* utilises crystalline textures and ethereal synths that evoke the quality of floating on a cloud. It's testament to Diane Pellotieri and her new songwriting partner Clément Hateau that the songs don't all coalesce into one (admittedly pleasant) dream dirge. Having formed in 2017, Pencey Sloe already command respect with Alcest's Neige and Godflesh/Jesu mastermind Justin K. Broadrick guesting on *The Run I* and *II* respectively. Judging by these 10 songs, it's easy to see why such cult legends have given the duo their patronage.

FOR FANS OF: GGGOLDDD, Slow Crush, Jesu
REMFRY DEDMAN



RED ROT

Mal De Vivre

SVART

Ephel Duath alumni beef up their avant-aggressive credentials

Red Rot's debut album tackles pandemic-fuelled existential crises head-on. It's the product of Ephel Duath founding member/multi-instrumentalist Davide Tiso and Luciano Lorusso, vocalist between 2003-2008. Ephel Duath always had an avant-garde

approach to their brutality. This trait has matured into an amalgam of tech/prog extremity with gothic overtures and bloody big riffs. Abrasively urgent throughout its 17 short, diverse tracks, *Mal De Vivre* squeezes technical flurries and flourishes in every possible moment amid the hooks. Red Rot offer sophisticatedly raw and brutal music, played with the flair and charisma of veteran musicians.

FOR FANS OF: Akercocke, Rivers Of Nihil, Morbid Angel

TOM O'BOYLE



RUSSIAN CIRCLES

Gnosis

SARGENT HOUSE

Chicago's instru-metal standard bearers keep their flag flying

Considering they've been operating in the same space for almost 20 years, it says a lot that instru-metallers Russian Circles can still enthrall. The band's eighth album offers exactly the artful, impeccably crafted post-metal you'd expect, and is capable of evoking the glower of doom and the icy claws of black metal while ensuring everything hews to the band's established universe. Crenellated chugs and fortified riff-slabs are deployed with precision despite their magnitude, and the band never fail to thread things with a keen melodic sensibility. If surprises are in relatively short supply, the band are still capable of throwing in the occasional curveball; Neurosis-tinged opener *Tupilak*, for example, is brooding, enigmatic and thoroughly magnificent.

FOR FANS OF: Pelican, Cult Of Luna, The Ocean

ALEX DELLER



Maledictus

Former Moonspell drummer sets off in search of new treasure

Seventh Storm's drummer and founder, Mike Gaspar, spent 28 years in Moonspell. With three decades' experience behind him, there's a lot to enjoy about *Maledictus*, an album that evokes feelings far more melancholic and personal and than the pirate-y vibes of their cover art. This introspection is felt in the first 20 seconds of the opening *Pirate's Curse*. Gothic, hooky and blackened, it twists into a minor chord, just like *Wolfshade* did in 1995. Reminders of Moonspell pepper *Maledictus*, like the untethered and mournful *Inferno Rising* and the 90s throwback riffing of the Eastern-tinged *Gods Of Babylon*. But nothing showcases Gaspar's personal contribution as writer and arranger better than *Saudade* – a stirring tribute to lost loves that pegs Seventh Storm as future favourites.

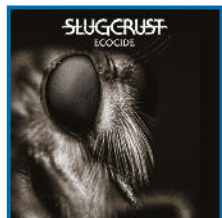
HOLLY WRIGHT

PEACEVILLE

Thirty years since Sigh's debut EP attracted the enthusiastic attention of Norwegian black metal scene lynchpin

Euronymous, the prolific Tokyo stalwarts maintain a hard-won reputation for impassioned creative flair, atmospheric versatility and playful imagination. They're one of a handful of bands responsible for exploding BM's horizons in more progressive, psychedelic directions. However, for all Sigh's diversity and mischief, band mastermind Mirai Kawashima has always understood the overriding importance of the killer tune, never losing sight of the need to get fists in the air and heads banging. Seldom have Sigh achieved this more resoundingly than on this 12th LP. Appearances might suggest more of the oriental folk influence that ennobled 2018's *Heir To Despair*, but there's none of that. *Shiki* is gleefully defined more by imperial, crunching riffs, dazzling twin-axe melodies and Mirai's tasteful cosmic synth runs.

CHRIS CHANTLER



Ecocide

Dystopian diatribes from the frontlines of planetary collapse

South Carolina's Slugcrust sound as scummy on their debut as the name suggests – a lo-fi affray of grind, d-beat and crust, topped off with a foul dollop of sludge. Opener *Demise Promise* starts slow, loose and rough as hell, a predatory encirclement before a breathless assault. Jesse Cole's feral rattling gutturals and rasping rants sound fuelled by a diet of crushed glass, fags and petrol. Of 12 tracks only two exceed two minutes, relentlessly switching pace.

TOM O'BOYLE



CENTURY MEDIA

Currently crafting the follow-up to 2020's *Enlightened In Eternity*, doom/classic metal merchants Spirit Adrift have decided to blow off some steam with this collection of covers, which also includes two original tracks. Led by industrious former Gatecreeper shredder Nate Garrett, *20 Centuries Gone* features faithful renditions of old favourites such as Pantera's *Hollow* and Metallica's *Escape*, and it's a fun but sometimes forgettable walk down memory lane. There are some welcome surprises, namely the metallised-up version of Lynyrd Skynyrd deep cut *Poison Whiskey* and the ice-cool run-through of Thin Lizzy's evergreen *Waiting For An Alibi*, but ultimately this is purely for completists. On the plus side, new efforts *Sorcerer's Fate* and the Down-esque neck-botherer *Mass Formation Psychosis* suggest that their fifth album could be their best yet.

FOR FANS OF: Grand Magus, Pallbearer, Down

EDWIN McFEE



Deathrattle Sing For Me

Metalcore mainstays find breathing space among the battery

IT'S NOT BEEN easy at times for Douglasville, Georgia residents Norma Jean. Since their inception in 1997 they've gone through more line-up changes than most, yet despite this, they've also released some of the highest quality metalcore albums around.



Ninth album *Deathrattle Sing For Me* keeps that standard going. As made clear with the sprawling and Deftones-influenced lead single *Call For The Blood*, however, this effort sees Norma Jean enter personally uncharted waters, stepping out of their musical comfort zone in pursuit of progression.

With so much spare time to write a follow-up to 2019's *All Hail* for the obvious reasons, *Deathrattle...* sees the band incorporate over 200 different recording tracks to make up the 13 songs here. These range from the jarring samples that appear at the climax of the crushing break in *Spearmint Revolt* to the calmer, more serene elements like the sparking electricity and peaceful synth in *Memorial Hoard*. It's all via the chunky riffs Norma Jean are so well-known for and the agonised, full-octave screams by vocalist Cory Brandon that make you wonder how he didn't blow his voice out after every song.

Tellingly though, the band have balanced the album out so as not to alienate what is a rabid and fiercely loyal fanbase; the chaos of their off-kilter time signatures and borderline noise rock movements still reign supreme, but the inclusion of numbers such as *Parallella* helps to avoid a listener burnout from an all-out assault. The vocal hooks are also at their best, from opener *1994's 'I think I'm witnessing the end of the world and I like it'* to the closing, eight-minute *Heartache*, with Cory screaming '*This world was never meant for me / Or I was never meant for it*'. Like the rest of the album, it's pure, anguished poetry.

ELLIOT LEAVER



PARKWAY DRIVE

Darker Still

FPITAPH

Aussie kings snatch victory from the jaws of oblivion

JUST A FEW months ago, Parkway Drive's future seemed murky. Having cancelled a US tour in order to work on internal relationships that were seemingly at breaking point during its recording, album seven is met by as much relief as excitement. And while the turbulent nature of its development and the employment of therapists has a whiff of *St. Anger*'s creation, the results of *Darker Still* bear more of a resemblance to the globe-conquering aesthetic of *The Black Album*.



A continuation of the steady evolution over the band's past few efforts, *Darker Still's* distillation of ideas into a more methodical, deliberate sound is perfectly aimed for the arenas and headline slots the band now comfortably occupy. *The Greatest Fear*, *Like Napalm*, *Imperial Heretic* and the unmistakable power ballad tropes of the title track are instantaneous anthems that embed themselves into your cranium. While Winston McCall continues to diversify his vocal attack on every track, channelling righteous

indignation outside and in, the man of the match award goes to Jeff Ling. Always capable of writing a lead line that can ignite mass singalongs, almost

every song here has a soaring guitar part that steals the show, combined with iconic solos nodding to messrs Slash and Hammett.

While the highest peaks are sought and scaled, *Darker Still* isn't lacking the band's undeniable grunt. After the minimalist thrum

of *If A God Can Bleed*, *Soul Bleach* stomps through with disregard, the dystopian synth-led *Land Of The Lost* builds into a ferocious eruption, and *From The Heart Of The Darkness* morphs from an unashamedly simple riff to end proceedings in a colossal wall of sound. That Parkway Drive are back at all is a blessing. That they've set their sights on the stratosphere is even more thrilling.

FOR FANS OF: Architects, Disturbed, Metallica

ADAM BRENNAN

Parkway Drive: back.
Thank fuck



STRAY FROM THE PATH

Euthanasia

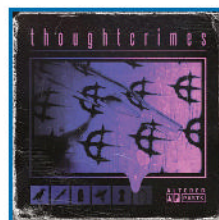
UNFD

NY hardcore punks keep killing it (in the name)

Twenty-one years and 10 albums in, Stray From The Path have amassed a catalogue of groove-laden, politically charged, hip hop-infused hardcore that should be the envy of their peers. While *Euthanasia* doesn't veer far from their past work, it's their biggest and boldest album yet. Those Rage Against The Machine comparisons that have followed them around for the majority of their career aren't going anywhere, but, at their best, SFTP are capable of matching their intensity, and you can definitely imagine these songs popping off live and causing a seriously chaotic reaction. A riot-starting good time, as ever.

FOR FANS OF: Rage Against The Machine, Fever333, Norma Jean

STEPHEN HILL



THOUGHTCRIMES

Altered Pasts

PURE NOISE

Ex-Dillinger drummer takes the torch into thrilling new territories

This debut album, led by ex-Dillinger Escape Plan drummer Billy Rymer, is testament to the saying that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Billy also plays guitar on *Altered Pasts*, which has plenty of the frenetic energy that made his former outfit so beloved. *Panopticon* and *Deathbed Confessions* are

excellent examples, but there's also a sizeable chunk of more conventional and atmospheric passages, such as the hypnotic, metalcore-tinged *New Infinities*. Billy may joke that Thoughtcrimes don't know what they're doing, but that's selling the band short. While many still pine for Dillinger, their members are carrying the torch forward into captivating and exciting new territories.

FOR FANS OF: The Dillinger
Escape Plan, Converge,
Black Peaks

ELLIOT LEAVER



THUNDERMOTHER

Black And Gold

AFM

Sweden's hard rockers make a bid for all the ages

If you're looking for a fresh take on AC/DC or a complement to Halestorm, Thundermother tick those boxes. As if their irresistible hard rocking wasn't enough to hook you on their first three albums, founder/guitarist Filippa Nässil has been studying at the London Songwriting Academy to pen tunes that would, in her words, appeal to "even my mother". Sultry anthemic ballad *Hot Mess* is one example of *Black And Gold*'s multi-generational appeal, while *Borrowed Time*'s musings on post-gig euphoria is engineered for a sea of lighters. Fuelled by knee-sliding guitar licks as on *Watch Out* with its *Cowboys From Hell*-esque dizzy rhythms, and *Stratosphere*'s strutting chorus, this is another step up for the ambitious Swedes.

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FOR FANS OF: Halestorm, Bon Jovi, Hardcore Superstar

HOLLY WRIGHT



TOMB OF FINLAND
Across The Barren Fields
UPRISING!

Nineties melodic death metal – the Finnish way

Totally-unrelated-to-metal moniker notwithstanding (just drop the B and do your research), this is a return to the very Finnish 90s take on melodeath that was forged by Amorphis and Sentenced. One of the best of the bunch were Charon. And since TOF main songwriter Jasse von Hast spent 11 years playing guitar with them, this new venture follows more or less the same road, albeit with a heavier and doomier edge. Mostly mid-tempo-oriented, the fairly simple formula is stretched over nine tracks here, with heavy power chords and catchy, repetitive melodic licks that go easy on the ears. It's only hindered by the somewhat lacklustre, if intelligible growls. *Across The Barren Fields* is generic, formulaic and yet, characteristically for those Finns, it works.

FOR FANS OF: Amorphis, Sentenced, Noumena

OLIVIER BADIN



TRIAL (SWE)
Feed The Fire
METAL BLADE

Scandic heavy metallers align themselves to a different beat

Not to be confused with other bands that share the name, this quintet from Trollhättan, Sweden, return after five years with a fourth full-length studio album and a new singer. Trial integrated Arthur

W. Andersson sensibly into their line-up, scrapping a set of songs that were no longer suitable for a statement they consider not only more up tempo than 2017's *Motherless*, but one that also adds lyrical maturity. Guitarist Alexander Ellström has put clear daylight between his early influences, Mercyful Fate and Watain, to embrace new heroes: Jim Morrison of The Doors, and various US beat authors. Though on paper these developments could seem slightly worrying, *Feed The Fire* is an accomplished album, full of brisk tempos, muscular metaaaaal melodies and intelligent wordplay, plus a cameo from Tomas Lindberg on *Snare Of The Fowler*.

FOR FANS OF: Mercyful Fate, Fates Warning, Helloween

DAVE LING



ULTIMA GRACE
Ultima Grace
FRONTIERS MUSIC

Anette Olzon and Japanese power metallers go into overdrive

Between last year's solo album, *Strong*, and her latest collaboration with Symphony X vocalist Russell Allen, Anette Olzon has also found the time to lend her impressive lungs to Ultima Grace, the new project of Japanese power metal maestro Yuhki. Unlike the Allen/Olzon set-up, it's a full band, with Yuhki's Alhambra bandmates Hideki and Toshihiro joining Atsushi Hasegawa in backing Anette's distinctive voice. They've thrown everything at this record, and at full speed. The album starts out strong with the catchy *Getting On With Life*, but frequently gives way to overlong bouts of widdling

and other power metal tropes (think rain sound effects, orchestral synths and choirs) until it becomes cacophonous. The more eccentric moments are the most fun; tracks like the frenetic *Beguile The Night* are ultimately the most charming, as they're at their best when they're being unabashedly weird and proggy.

FOR FANS OF: *Stratovarius*,
Sonata Arctica, *Symphony X*
CATHERINE MORRIS



VALBORG
Der Alte

LUPUS LOUNGE
Dark, brutal defiance with a post-punk twist

One of Germany's most intriguing bands, Valborg have always been too spiky and weird to fit into standard pigeonholes. Instead, *Der Alte* offers a pitch-black outpouring of brutal angst, wherein the thudding, mid-paced gait of the darkest industrial rock collides with the frayed-nerve hostility of black metal, and everybody winds up dead as a result. Noticeably more unhinged than 2019's *Zentrum*, their latest is as heavy as any of its predecessors, while also displaying a more overt and gleeful debt to the ritualistic post-punk of Killing Joke and Amebix. Dominated by the muscular thump of drummer Florian Toyka, *Urecho*, *Anacke* and *Saturn Eros Xenomorph* are as succinct and thrilling as they are brutish and oppressive. The title track offers a rare moment of ghoulish restraint, but big riffs and bad vibes are the mesmerising main attraction here.

FOR FANS OF: Samael, Mantar, Killing Joke

DOM LAWSON



SOILWORK
Övergivnheten
NUCLEAR BLAST

Melodeath veterans keep pace with the Swedish renaissance

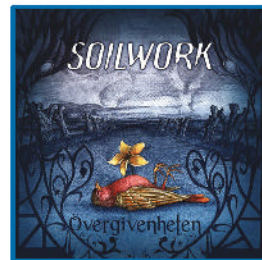
WITH AT THE Gates, Dark Tranquillity and Arch Enemy still releasing sterling albums, plus the upcoming box office bout between In Flames and The Halo Effect, Swedish melodic death metal has found itself at its most high profile for years. Naturally, you can't approach the subgenre without mentioning Soilwork, who have been on their own run of evolution and form, as evidenced by their last full-length, 2019's *Verkligheten*, and the excellent 2020 EP, *A Whisp Of The Atlantic*. As such, album 12 sees the Helsingborg collective brimming with confidence to push themselves while producing instantaneous songs in the process.

The opening title track is typical of the band's recent output, with instantly relatable riffs leading into a chorus where Björn 'Speed' Strid shows off his finely tuned vocals. Even the more rugged *Electric Again* and *Is It In Your Darkness* can't help but give into the palatable synths and clean vocals, with a surprisingly effective violin lead on the former. Given the enormous satisfaction Speed gets from The Night Flight Orchestra's AOR worship, it's not surprising to see the lines between the two bands continue to blur with great effect on the likes of *Valleys Of Gloom*.

It's this melding of the two projects that really takes off halfway through proceedings when *Death, I Hear You Calling* and *Dreams Of Nowhere* rock up with unashamed swagger and mid-tempo stomp, while *This Godless Universe* and *Golga* take flight off a wall of drums, synths, strings and shimmer. Finally, *On The Wings Of A Goddess / Through Flaming Sheets Of Rain* wraps most of Övergivnheten's ideas into seven and a half minutes of duelling guitars, diverse textures and Speed's soaring vocals, capping off a victorious album in style. Seemingly written off in their prime, Soilwork's resurgence is one of the genre's finest tales of triumph.

FOR FANS OF: Dark Tranquillity, In Flames, Killswitch Engage

ADAM BRENNAN



LIVE REVIEWS

PEARL JAM
PIXIES

HYDE PARK, LONDON

Alt rock behemoths forge a communal state of grace

IT'S NO OVERSTATEMENT

to say that the 90s alt rock boom couldn't have happened without **PIXIES**, their post-punk and leftfield rock chops laying the blueprint for everyone from Dinosaur Jr. to Pearl Jam, Nirvana and Bush. Their sound might generally evoke New York attics and subterranean clubs, but the band look surprisingly at home amid the carefully manicured greenery of Hyde Park.

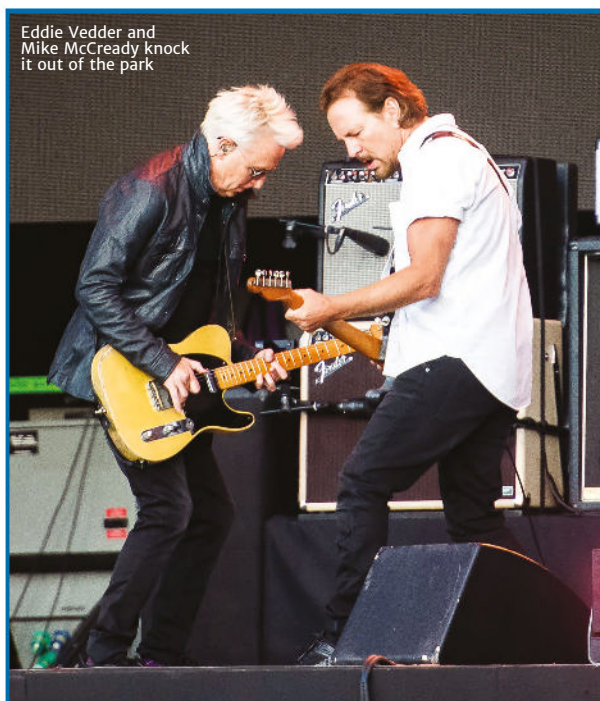
It's only the perpetual weirdo vibe given off by singer Black Francis that suggests Pixies are anything other than the consummate festival band. Chatty in a nervous and almost neurotic way, there's a haphazardness to the band's onstage patter and performance that only makes them more endearing. The little screw-ups and changes of tack are a reminder that alt rock wasn't ever meant to replicate the stadium-filling excess of its mainstream counterpart.

Pixies' set is stacked decidedly in favour of classic material, with only *There's A Moon On* creeping in from this century. Still, you can't argue with the results when *Wave Of Mutilation*, *Here Comes Your Man* and *Where Is My Mind?* in particular get such enthusiastic receptions. The latter even prompts some shuffled dance moves in the field – no small feat when most of the crowd are frying on the spot like so much fresh pork product.

Questions of how Pixies ended up on the bill at all can quickly be dismissed as **PEARL JAM** frontman Eddie Vedder tells a story about the band shopping in Camden on their first ever UK tour and how excited they were to find a rare Pixies live bootleg. "To be here today, sharing a stage with the Pixies, in this town, really means something to us," the vocalist says, one of many heartfelt speeches Eddie indulges in during the night.

Where Pixies set the blueprint for subversive alt rock, Pearl Jam turned it into a heaven-spearing monolith, taking the genre to the top of the

Eddie Vedder and Mike McCready knock it out of the park



SETLIST

Better Man
Low Light
Breath
Mind Your Manners
Save You
Quick Escape
In Hiding
Retrograde
Light Years
Even Flow
Unthought Known
Daughter
Superblood
Wolfmoon
Given To Fly
Public Image
Once
Porch

ENCORE

I'm The Answer
Jeremy
Indifference
Alive
Rockin' In The Free World

charts and filling stadiums, arenas and, yes, parks, around the world with their earnest brand of rock'n'roll.

They aren't the kind of band to stumble out, yell "Hello, Cleveland!" and churn through the same 20 hits they've played for the last 90 nights in a row. Instead, every setlist is carefully curated to offer a mixture of hits, rarities and fan favourites, a dynamic musical narrative that seemingly bows only to the whims of the band themselves.

Opening with ballad *Better Man*, the start of Pearl Jam's set feels like a gentle warm-up for the night to come, a handy reprieve from the stifling summer heat. It's not long, though, before they're busting out their 70s guitar god chops; the core riff of *Breath* crashes and leaps at regular intervals, communicating the electric fizz of the band's early material in ways that perhaps the flesh is less inclined to after 30 years. Even if the band aren't leaping around the stage and climbing the rafters

these days – though Eddie certainly seems to consider trying to climb the gigantic decorative tree running alongside the rigging – the likes of *Mind Your Manners* and *Save You* add a healthy dose of 70s-style punk lightning that gets the pulse racing. The band even slip the 'No future' refrain of *God Save The Queen* onto the end of *Quick Escape*.

Eddie addresses the audience with a warmth and earnestness that strips away a lot of the usual rock star cliché bullshit, taking up the soapbox on issues ranging from gun control to abortion rights in reference to the myriad societal ills his home country still faces. But it's the moments where he addresses personal issues – the loss of friends, family and even fans – that feels like the truest glimpse into why Pearl Jam are so beloved among their grunge and alt rock peers. After *Save You*, the shadow of grief passes over Eddie's face as he admits they weren't able to save who the song was written for, his voice trailing off as he looks over the crowd.

Pearl Jam don't so much wear their hearts on their sleeves as tattoo them across their entire bodies, so such moments of stark emotional intensity are commonplace at their shows. Therein lies the magic, however – the sense of shared emotional outpouring and energy elevating the whole experience beyond the realms of a normal gig. The songs almost become secondary to the experience. As fun as it is jumping around to *Even Flow*, or singing along to *Jeremy* and *Daughter*, it's in singular instances like the band dedicating rarity *Light Years* to a fallen fan, tagging snippets of *War Pigs* and *Fear Of The Dark* onto the end of mega-hit *Alive* or covering Neil Young's *Rockin' In The Free World* with tennis pro John McEnroe that highlights just how unpredictable a Pearl Jam show can be, even after 30 years of playing to thousands of fans every night.

RICH HOBSON



Pearl Jam: Eddie Vedder
spreads the love



Vulvodinya buckle in for the ride

VULVODYNIA

PINTGLASS / POSTMORTEM PROMISES

BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON

South Africa's deathcore destroyers get mangled in the mix

IT'S NOT EXACTLY

what you could call busy for **POSTMORTEM PROMISES**, who open this evening's deathcore triple bill. They're scene veterans, returning from an 11-year hiatus earlier this year, and there's definitely some ring-rust as well as a poor mix that often obscures the vocals. The enthusiastic front rows don't seem to mind, though, and even if the material isn't the most imaginative, the band deliver beatdown after beatdown and pig squeals aplenty.

Judging by the number of logo-emblazoned high-vis jackets, there's more than a few people here for **PINTGLASS**'s self-styled 'geezacore'. Meatheaded beatdowns and slams are the order of the day; their Stella Artois, lad-culture-meets-deathcore would come across as contrived if it weren't delivered with tongue firmly in cheek. If you want anthems for getting hammered, getting into barfights and crawling into work with the mother of all hangovers, Pintglass bring them in spades and the front half of the room adore them for it. Their patter between songs is all about –



Pintglass were having a smashing time

you guessed it – being a geezer and their dual vocalists often talk over each other, as do the other two with mics parked in front of them. It's all chaotic and more than a little bit silly.

VULVODYNIA make the most of finally being able to tour last year's critically acclaimed *Praenuntius Infiniti*, its intro booming out the speakers as they come on then tear through *The Shadowy Descent Of Gaia*, followed by *Eternal Wasteland Of Galaxies*.

It's not the awe-inspiring opener it should be, through no fault of their own. An appalling mix removes guitars and synths from the equation entirely, leaving just drums and vocals. It's memorable for all the wrong reasons, if mostly rectified soon. That doesn't bother the crowd one jot, as pits start from near enough the first note. There's a lurking feeling of being underwhelmed for the entire set, their more technical flourishes being lost to the mix. It's all very tight but doesn't feel heavy or impactful. At least the band are having a great time, praising the crowd for welcoming them back after so long away.

WILL MARSHALL

BUÑUEL

CAFÉ OTO, LONDON

A renowned venue for the far reaches of jazz and the avant-garde, it's likely that Café OTO hasn't hosted anyone like Eugene Robinson before. If you're familiar with Oxbow then you'll know his MO – black duct tape over the ears, a propensity to strip down from his suit to his underwear, and to bring his formidable, extreme fighter-trained presence to bear on anyone who displeases him – in this case the young chap filming the gig on his phone from the off. Part Sammy Davis Jr. debonaire, part Tom Waits-esque intoxicated narrator, he's one of the few genuinely confrontational artists we have left. For Buñuel, he's swapped the humid, sinew-strained blues rock of his regular band for three Italian maestros equally adept at dissolute avant-rock, Bowery-blitzing punk riffs, and Big Black-style staccato, powder-keg agitation. Eugene himself physically relives former fights as his rich, mostly spoken-word drawls, needles, hollers and leads you through an unstable internal maze where threats lurk at every impossible corner, tension mounts, and mayhem is moulded, as it all reverberates around a crowd either in thrall or losing their shit at the sheer wild wonder being unleashed.

JONATHAN SELZER

THOU

PORTRAYAL OF GUILT / COOL JERKS

THE LANES, BRISTOL

Save for one bloke at the front giving it his all, Leeds punk outfit **COOL JERKS** play to a largely unmoved room. They're a million miles away stylistically from the headliners, but their abrasive, confrontational sound harks back to the Pistols and the Angelic Upstarts in their prime, and that's not an easy thing to pull off. Texan trio **PORTRAYAL OF GUILT** fare much better on a reception front, their sludge metal getting heads banging, pits opening and a louder appreciation than their predecessors. They're also helped by having riffs for days and a loud, balls-to-the-wall sound that allows their riffs to hit at maximum impact. Both pale in comparison to **THOU**, however, who give an hour-long masterclass in the marriage of sludge and doom. Pushing the sound system to breaking point, the likes of *Lonely Vigil* and *The Changeling Prince* are so loud and crushing it's a miracle the pins on the bowling alley next door aren't falling over through the sheer power of the vibrations. With a triple guitar attack adding an extra layer of filth to an already dirty sound, this is an uncompromising and vicious assault on the ears for everyone present – just how we like it.

ELLIOT LEAVER



Old Man Gloom find delirium in the depths

OLD MAN GLOOM

DIVIDE AND DISSOLVE / PETBRICK

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Post-metal dream team engineer a night of beautifully abrasive noise

YOU COULD COUNT on your hands and feet the number of people in the Underworld when **PETBRICK** take the stage. That is criminal. The noise punks are the side-project of former Sepultura man Iggor Cavalera, easily one of the best drummers in heavy music. It's his idiosyncratic smacking that drives the duo, his tribal-sounding snare instantly bouncing off the walls. Add in Wayne Adams' cataclysmic noise samples and you have an oppressive half-hour that **DIVIDE AND DISSOLVE** can't touch. On record, Takiaya Reed and Sylvie Nehill are an arresting drone metal force. Their cacophonous guitars and powerhouse drums are accompanied by subtle nuances that honour their indigenous roots. Here, though? The intricacies are lost in the venue's blackness, making this pair sound more akin to a drummer slowly warming up at a construction site. Takiaya

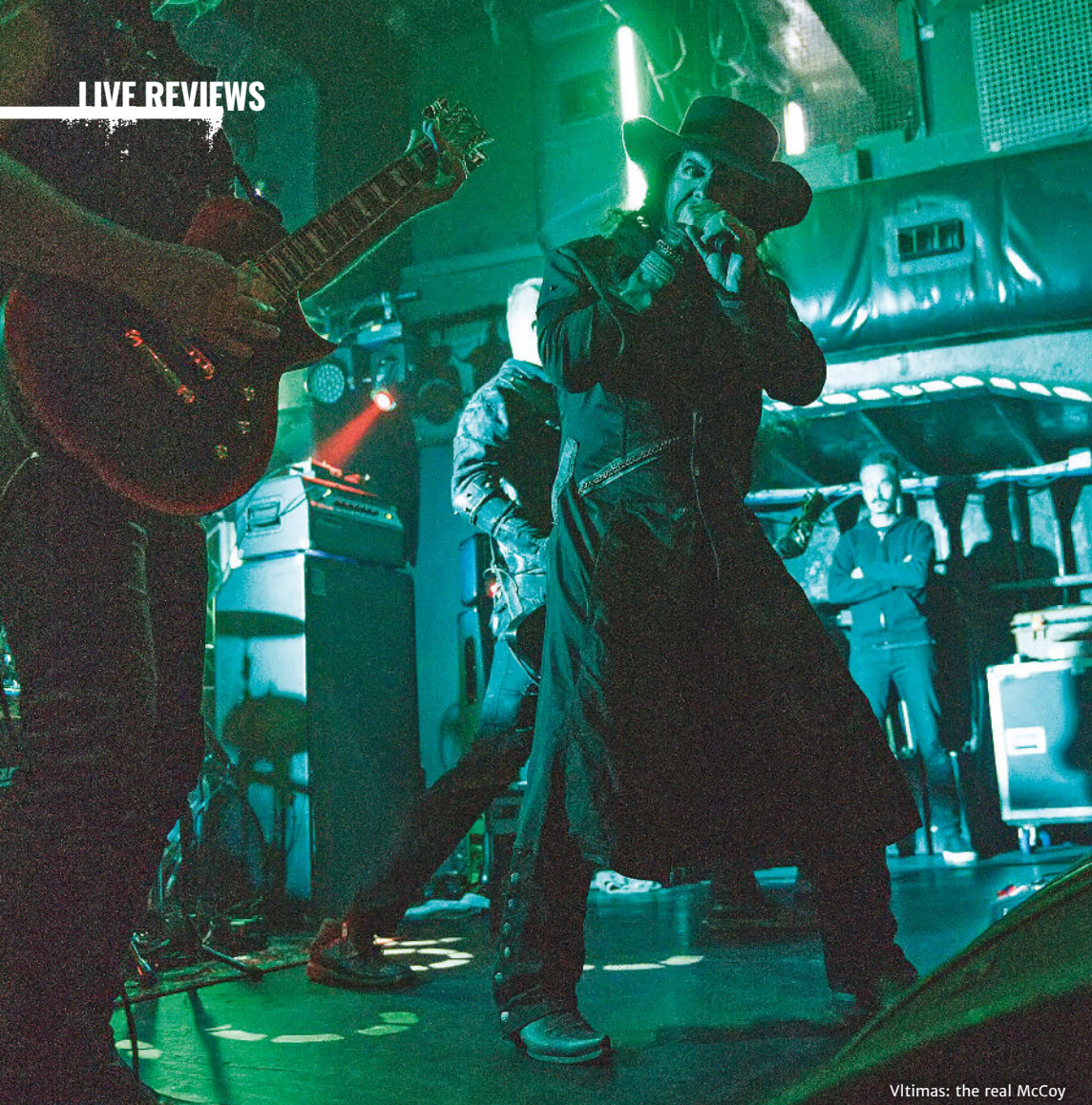
is also a painfully uncharismatic frontwoman between songs. Speeches about vital topics like colonialism and dismantling borders transform into awkward ramblings about how "punk" Camden is, and they go on forever. Sadly, this is a set with all the poise and skill of something at a secondary school open mic night.

In stark contrast, **OLD MAN GLOOM** sound like they've been genetically engineered to be the perfect post-metal performers. Of course, their prestigious line-up includes members of Isis, Converge and Cave In, but their penchant for darting from noise music to ear-battering heaviness will always make them a dynamic jolt live. Tonight is no exception. The first moshpit of the evening ignites immediately after that initial blast of guitar chords and never lets up. Guitarists Nate Newton and Aaron Turner lead the juggernauts' vocal

attack, although it's actually bassist and backing singer Stephen Brodsky who flaunts the most intense pipes. His roar could slice London in two, which starkly contrasts with his merry demeanour onstage.

First and foremost, Old Man Gloom have always been a conglomeration of old mates from the Massachusetts metal scene, and their flawless chemistry spotlights that. Joyous smiles are frequently traded, before *Sleeping With Snakes* shows off a flicker of rock'n'roll theatre. Newton, Turner and Brodsky all lift their instruments and drop them at the same time, perfectly coinciding with drummer Santos Montano's blasting percussion. Both the band and their fans have found happiness in the dankest depths of post-metal's quagmires, and it makes for a night of communal catharsis in the capital.

MATT MILLS



Vltimas: the real McCoy

VLTIMAS

THEKLA, BRISTOL

Metal legends unite for a too-brief blast of glory

WHILE THE REST of Bristol's population enjoy their warm cider and crispy sunburn, a small contingent of metal fans gathers at the Thekla to throw their middle fingers upwards in defiance of that bright bastard in the sky. Tonight, we bear witness to the ungodly might of Vltimas. Surprisingly, this evening sees no support acts, only the blackened death metal supergroup that includes ex-Morbid Angel vocalist/bassist/terrifying man David Vincent, former Mayhem guitarist Rune 'Blasphemer' Eriksen and Cryptopsy drummer Flo Mounier. It's anyone's guess why they're doing this solo tonight or what they have in store to fill up the two-hour slot they've given themselves with only a single album's worth of material. Well, an hour and a half by the time they kick things off 20 minutes after their scheduled start time.

What the crowd lacks in capacity is made up by their zealot enthusiasm as a front row of nutcases headbang and scream along to apocalyptic opener and album title track *Something Wicked Marches In*. After hanging out in the shadows for a few minutes, Vincent makes his entrance, leering over his followers

like a Satanic desert prophet in an outfit that would put The Undertaker to shame. When he isn't bellowing his signature guttural vibrato, he takes the opportunity between songs to dish out his anti-authoritarian wisdom laced with his cheeky charm, albeit to a mixed response from the audience.

With the exception of a drum solo and a cracking Southern metal-styled cover of Alice Cooper's *Go To Hell*, the band's set is an almost verbatim run-through of their 2019 album. The quality of their performance is nigh on ungodly, with every blastbeat and thunderous riff executed with monstrous intensity. But just when things seem to be hitting their peak for Vltimas, it's curtains, leaving the crowd on an abrupt and a slightly awkward note that has everyone scratching their head thinking, "Is that it?" With no encore to speak of, it all feels like a quick in-and-out job. Playing for just shy of an hour, it's a massive shame considering the acres of time left before curfew. A big opportunity missed to show off new music or showcase the local talent. This degree of quality deserves more quantity.

HYWEL DAVIES

GAMA BOMB HELLRIPPER

BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON

The hellacious heatwave might have prevented a few people coming out to celebrate a night of searing thrash for Gama Bomb's 20th anniversary tour. It's a shame because openers **HELLRIPPER** are just plain fun. They open with *Total Mayhem*, blasting through half an hour of blackened thrash with constant grins. The middling reception they get doesn't do them justice; the sheer energy they exude and the frenetic pace of the songs are all the raw material you need for a guaranteed good time. Dramatic classical music precedes **GAMA BOMB**'s opening with the bombastic *Sea Savage*. While the mix isn't initially in their favour, that's swiftly rectified and the Irish thrashers are on fine form. Regrettably, the crowd hasn't noticeably grown, but there's still plenty of moshing in the front rows despite that and the humidity. There's even a pantomime entrance and a "He's behind you!" call-and-response for everyone's favourite "worst mascot", the Gamabominable Snowman. Part of their enduring appeal is their blending 80s thrash with both social commentary and the incredibly silly, with songs "about buying a possessed C90 cassette tape", while *Miami Supercops* is their love letter to the cult comedy cop movie of the same name. Here's to the next 20.

WILL MARSHALL

NEBULA THE ATOMIC BITCHWAX

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Sharing a rhythm section with Monster Magnet, you know **THE ATOMIC BITCHWAX** have to be good but, perhaps it's also because it's founder member Chris Kosnik's birthday today, the band are on fire tonight. From the opening jam of Edgar Winter's *Frankenstein* riff to the closing riff of, oh, *Frankenstein* again, they lay down an hour of huge, muscle-bound 70s rocking, like a Grand Funk Railroad eight-track played in a 1970 Ford Mustang. A rammed Underworld is left grinning from sideburn to sideburn. If there was a stoner rock Mount Rushmore, Eddie Glass would have a good claim to be there. Three decades of riff abuse have seen him practically define the fuzz rock aesthetic both with Fu Manchu and for the last 25 years with **NEBULA**. The sandblasted trio show no sign of letting up. New LP *Transmission From Mothership Earth* is a glorious trip and boy, does it translate well live. Monolithic fuzzed-out riffs, Sabbathian low-end, trippy freak-out and swirling space rock are all wrapped up in five minute blasts, so they never feel like they have overstayed their welcome. Fuzz freak nirvana.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

THE PRODIGY

BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Essex's beloved rabble-rousers pay tribute to their talisman

IT'S LITERALLY THE hottest week ever. But judging by the anticipation in the room, if The Prodigy's spiritual home of Brixton Academy was on fire, underwater or on top of an erupting volcano, that wouldn't have stopped this eclectic group of ravers, punks, rockers and outsiders coming to pay tribute to the late Keith Flint tonight. It's been more than three years since The Prodigy's manic court jester passed away, throwing their entire existence into doubt, and how we've missed them, and miss him.

As The Prodigy stroll on, now a four-piece, and burst straight into *Breathe*, Brixton goes fucking bananas, and is turned into part rave, part prison riot, part sauna in Hell. The intensity with which Keith's lines are sung back to the band, as Maxim Reality points the mic out to the crowd to fill in the blanks, is astonishing, the sound of three years of pent-up grief, adoration and euphoria spewing out of 5,000 people.

The Prodigy, of course, are one of the greatest live acts in the history of music, and even without Keith, they remain so. *Voodoo People* and *Their Law* sound brutal thanks to live guitarist Rob Holliday's complementary savage riffing; *No Good (Start The Dance)* is played at a pace that Slayer would be proud of; the bass drops on *Need Some1* boom like an atomic bomb going off in the ocean; and *Smack My Bitch Up* inspires arm flinging and pogoing from the front of the stage to the corridor outside the main room. Yup, The Prodigy are still the most reliable carnage-starters in the game, but it would be wrong to suggest that there wasn't something missing. In theory there is no reason the band can't continue. Liam Howlett is the brains and creativity of The Prodigy, Maxim is one of the greatest rabble-rousing frontmen you'll ever see, but when *Firestarter's* iconic siren booms through the PA and Keith's silhouette is projected above the band, his lack of presence is so keenly felt. You never thought you'd see the day where people were openly weeping at a Prodigy show, but here we are. Maxim stands motionless and to attention as the song plays before telling us to "Give it up for Mr Flint, he's still here with us." The Prodigy in 2022, then: still one of the most breathtaking live bands you'll ever have the fortune of seeing, but now the experience is bittersweet.

STEPHEN HILL

The Prodigy: Maxim Reality carries the flame for the one true firestarter

For the stories behind the best albums and
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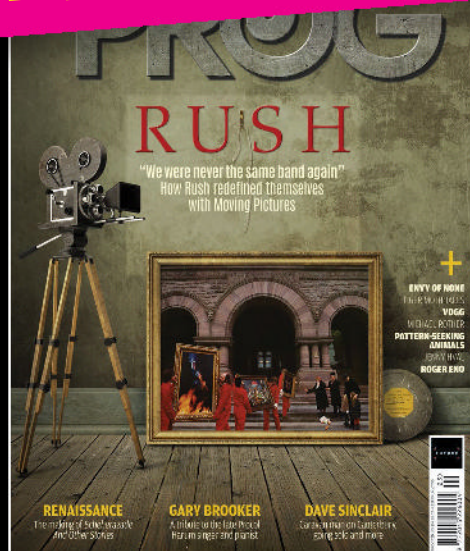
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URGENT APPEAL



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When you took the role of Eddie Munson, did you expect that it would take off like it has?

"Not at all. No, I think expectations get you in trouble in this game, and I couldn't have predicted people's warmth and acceptance for him. So it's a really lovely feeling, it caught me completely off guard."

What attracted you to the role in the first place?

"Well, the chances are so stacked against you – it's very rare to be asked to participate in something that has this much kind of cultural significance so it was a no-brainer."

How much of the character had been fleshed out when you were cast?

"I auditioned a couple of scenes that were actually in the show. We had no idea how many episodes he was going to be in; we were told at least four. But I didn't know anything about what would happen at the end, or how much he would actually be involved in the season. So I'm delighted that I got as much to sink my teeth into."

What were your influences for the character?

"I think we all have those people that were a little bit older than us growing up, that we admired or had a soft spot for. I was always very impressed with those people that were a little bit older than me that were very nonconformist, a little attention seeking."

How reflective is Eddie of you?

"Not much. We all have moments where we feel vulnerable, maybe overcompensate. I joined my school two years late, so I guess there was maybe a little bit of overcompensation there. But I've been very lucky, I've always had friends and haven't felt like too much of an outsider. But with all of my characters, if you don't humanise them, you don't care about them, and if people aren't vulnerable and themselves and authentic, you tend to not really want to be around them. I think we're far more drawn to someone that's offensively imperfect than someone that's constantly trying to be perfect and impressive."

"BLACK SABBATH WERE MY GUYS"



FIVE MINUTES WITH

JOSEPH QUINN

**EDDIE MUNSON
STRANGER THINGS**

Stranger Things' resident metalhead on playing Eddie Munson, guitar heroes and why Dave Grohl should write Corroded Coffin's music

WORDS: RICH HOBSON



We hear you "connected with the character through metal" – what were your entry points?

"I listened to *Master Of Reality* by Black Sabbath over and over. *Master Of Puppets* as well, Slayer... all that kind of stuff. That was my way into that whole world, really. Black Sabbath were my guys, and Led Zeppelin too, but I guess they're less metal."

Is it true you're actually a guitarist too?

"Yeah, I've played since I was a kid, but it's been woefully under practised in recent years."

What was it that got you into guitar?

"Well, my dad played guitar and my granddad played for a time, so it's something we'd do as a family. We are by no means virtuosos, but we all have a go."

Who are your guitar heroes?

"Hendrix is an obvious one, I was always very enamoured with him. Nirvana were my first proper band obsession; I had all of Kurt Cobain's posters on my wall. It's kind of cliché, but it's true."

Did you get any input on the epic *Master Of Puppets* solo in the new season? Was it your choice?

"I don't know where the fuck the showrunners got it from! Ha ha ha! But it was completely their choice. It was the perfect song for a crescendo to take us through this crazy sequence. I think it's an inspired choice, really."

Will we ever hear Eddie's band, Corroded Coffin?

"We're working on an EP... Joking! I'm joking!"

It's not that ridiculous – Dave Grohl did it with *Dream Widow* this year...

"Maybe I should email him – 'Would you write the music for Corroded Coffin please?'"

How would they sound?

"Oh, thrash! Proper, old-school thrash – really fast, really evil."

If you could play any rock star in a biopic, who would you choose?

"Keith Moon would be pretty cool, you could have a lot of fun with him. I don't understand how that hasn't been done already. I've actually heard that there's something in the works, but I don't think I'm in consideration for it. Whoever gets to go at that... That'll be a lot of fun." 

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